

NATURE IMAGERY IN AL-QUR'AN

By

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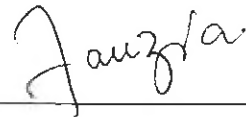
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ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: NATURE IMAGERY IN AL-QUR'AN

The Qur'an abounds in nature imagery. Most of this nature imagery pertains to the earth with more than 461 explicit references. The earth image, employed literally as well as figuratively, occurs in diverse contexts to reinforce some major themes in the Qur'an such as Allah's Sole Sovereignty, Man's Vicegerency, Doomsday, Resurrection, etc. The earth, like every other object of nature, emerges as a sign of Allah. The personified earth presents for man a model of submission to the will of Allah.

The present research aims at presenting an overview of the earth image in the Qur'an from a multi-dimensional perspective. Forms and style of earth imagery, along with general attributes and functions of nature imagery in Al-Qur'an, have also been touched upon.

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On the completion of this thesis, I am aware that I have hardly touched the surface of my chosen topic. Any good that this thesis might contain is solely due to the Grace and Mercy of Allah. All short-comings of this work are due to my own lack of knowledge and vision.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all those who love the Book of Allah and find in it a never ending source of solace and inspiration.

DELIMITATION

Owing to the abundance and diversity of nature imagery in Al-Qur'an, the researcher has delimited her topic by concentrating on Earth Imagery. The present research shows how the earth image occurs in the Qur'an with great frequency in diverse contexts to reinforce its major themes.

CHAPTER 1

QURAN – THE ETERNAL LIGHT AND GUIDANCE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

O mankind! Verily there hath come to you a convincing proof from your Lord: For We have sent unto you a light (that is) manifest. (4:174)¹

Al-Quran is the source of eternal light and guidance. Its message is not just for the Muslims. In the verse above not just Muslims but the entire mankind has been addressed. Mohammad Asad calls the Qur'an "[. . .] a book which, more than any other single phenomenon known to us, has fundamentally affected the religious, social and political history of the world" (i).

In the early days of Islam, the Muslims used Al-Qur'an not just as a book of religious instruction. Rather they also researched and pondered over it:

History bears testimony to the fact that the Qur'an brought about an unprecedented revolution among the people of the desert of Arabia under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The society that the Qur'an established set the ideals for generations to come. The mind that the Qur'an built enabled humanity to conquer nature rather than be a slave to it. (Malik)

Instead of worshipping nature, man tried to conquer it due to such Quranic injunctions:

And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: behold, in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect. (45:13)

According to Maurice Bucaille:

[. . .] at the height of Islam, between the Eighth and Twelfth centuries A.D., i.e. at a time when restrictions on scientific development were in force in the Christian world, a very large number of studies and discoveries were being made at Islamic universities. [. . .]

Consequently, the Muslims became the pioneers in medicine, chemistry, biology, algebra, astronomy, geology, physics as well as “jurisprudence, grammar, philology, morphology, syntax, phonology, semantics, semasiology and rhetoric” (Ahmad viii). While Europe was enveloped in dark ages, Muslim scientists like Al-Razi and Ibn Sina were discovering new frontiers of knowledge. Highlighting Qur’an’s “insistence on consciousness and knowledge”, Asad says that:

[. . .] it engendered among its followers a spirit of intellectual inquiry, ultimately ending in that splendid era of learning and scientific research which distinguished the world of Islam at the height of its cultural vigour [. . .] and gave rise to that revival of Western culture which we call the Renaissance, and thus became in the course of time largely responsible for the birth of what is described as the “age of science”: the age in which we are now living. (i)

Unfortunately, this state of affairs did not last. With the passage of time, Muslims stopped following the Quranic injunction to research and investigate. While honouring it with their hearts and souls, they stopped understanding the message of the Holy Quran. They just recited it as a means of earning “ثواب” i.e. “reward”. Today there are very few educated Muslims who have read the Holy Qur’an even once with understanding, to say nothing of the ignorant masses. Having cut themselves off from their bloodline i.e. the Holy Qur’an, Muslims today are facing humiliation all over the world.

The end of the twentieth century witnessed a revival of interest in the Qur’an. The world over, Muslims are becoming aware that the source of their physical and moral degradation is their ignorance of their Holy Book. The Qur’an says about those who turn away from the Book of Allah:

Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur’an, or are their hearts locked up by them? (47:24)

Today more and more Muslims are turning back to the Qur’an in an attempt to understand it. Not only that, the changing world scenario is forcing even the non-muslims to try and discover the message of this Book.

The researcher feels that the Quran should be studied not just superficially for “ibadat” i.e. worship and prayers. Rather, it should be researched upon from all possible angles. The importance of knowledge and research in Islam can be ascertained from the fact that in an age when few knew how to read or write, the first word of Qur’anic Revelation was “اقرأ” i.e. “proclaim” or “recite” or “read”. In fact:

The word qur'an lexically means 'reading' and came to refer to 'the text which is read'. The Muslim scripture often calls itself 'kitab'; lexically this means 'writing' and came to refer to 'the written book'. Thus the significance of uttering and writing the revealed scripture is emphasised from the very beginning of Islam, and is locked in the very nouns that designate the Qur'an. (Haleem 2)

The Qur'an should be researched upon from different perspectives. Muslim scientists can investigate it to add to their knowledge of physics, chemistry, biology, medicine and so on. They can use it as a source of discovering universal laws of science. Scientists like Bucaille and Haroon Yahya have made important contributions to show the complete conformity between the Qur'anic verses and modern scientific research. Social scientists such as psychologists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, jurists, etc., each can explore the Qur'an to further his own discipline. The historian and the archeologist would also find much in it for research. According to Israr Ahmed:

The Qur'an is a boundless ocean on which every sailor can sail only as far as his limited capacity can take him; and what useful discoveries he will make on his voyage will depend on the guidance he receives from the range of his knowledge and the breadth of his vision. (32)

In a long tradition narrated by Sayyidena Ali (RAA), we have the following remark of the Holy Prophet (SAW) about the Qur'an: "The scholars shall never be satiated with the study of the Qur'an, nor will its appeal ever diminish on account of repeated readings, nor will its marvels be ever exhausted (i.e., its study will ever continue to yield fresh fruits of knowledge and wisdom)." Reported by Tirmidhi (RA) and Darimi (RA). (qtd. in Ahmed, The Obligations 25)

The researcher is a student of English literature. She feels that the Quran is the greatest literature of all times. Not only its wisdom but also its beauty and diction are unparalleled. The greatness of the Quran can be understood from this verse:

If there were a Qur'an with which mountains were moved, or the earth were cloven asunder, or the dead were made to speak, (this would be the one!) (13:31)

According to Hans Robert Jauss, "The way in which a literary work at the historical moment of its appearance, satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience obviously provides a criterion for the determination of its aesthetic value" (192). The "first audience" of the Quran were Arabs who excelled in literature especially poetry. Labid ibn Rabi'ah, one of the best Arab poets whose poem was displayed on the Ka'bah, accepted Islam after reading the Qur'anic verses hanging next to his poem. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, who was going with a naked sword in hand to kill the

Prophet (pbuh), accepted Islam after hearing the Qur'anic verses (Doi 415-416). Quran itself records how the Arabs called it "magic":

When the Truth did come to them from Us, they said: "This is indeed evident sorcery!" (10:76)

If We had sent unto thee a written (message) on parchment, so that they could touch it with their hands, the Unbelievers would have been sure to say: "This is nothing but obvious magic!" (6:7)

The Quran issues a challenge to non-believers to present something of its calibre:

Let them then produce a recital like unto it - If (it be) they speak the Truth! (52:34)

This challenge is issued a number of times. They are asked to compose ten suras like it:

Or they may say, "He forged it," Say, "Bring ye then ten suras forged, like unto it, and call (to your aid) whomsoever ye can, other than Allah!- If ye speak the truth! (11:13)

Or a single sura:

And if ye are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, then produce a Sura like thereunto; and call your witnesses or helpers (If there are any) besides Allah, if your (doubts) are true. (2:23)

Or do they say, "He forged it"? Say: "Bring then a Sura like unto it, and call (to your aid) anyone you can, besides Allah, if it be ye speak the truth!"(10:38)

To do so they can call for their help not only all mankind but also genii. In fact, all besides Allah:

Say: "If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support. (17:88)

History bears testimony to the fact that in spite of numerous efforts, no one could meet the challenge of the Quran. Musailamah, Al-Aswad al-Ansa, Al-Nadr ibn al-Harith, Tulaihah ibn Khuwaylid al-Asadi, false claimants to prophethood, tried to do so. Abul 'Ala al-Ma'arri, Al-Mutunabbi, Ibn al-Muqaffa, the Arab poets "tried to compose something comparable to the Qur'anic style, but they failed miserably and it is reported that they broke their pen and tore away their scrolls" (Doi 418).

1.2. THE QUR'AN AND NATURE IMAGERY

The Quran contains injunctions, narratives, verses about the attributes of Allah as well as nature passages pertaining to Earth, Heaven, Hell and the Day of Judgement. The number of verses in the Qur'an containing nature imagery is very large.

Most of this nature imagery pertains to earth. Encompassing the heavens, it includes the clouds and rain, thunder and lightening, mountains, rivers, springs and seas, water and fire, metals like iron, silver and gold, gems like pearls, rubies and coral, a great diversity of insects (fly, ant, mosquito, spider, bee), birds and animals. Last but not the least, it talks to and of man - the main inhabitant of earth, eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, doing all sort of deeds, good and bad, in all his different states from conception to birth, babyhood, manhood and old age.

1.3. EARTH

In Awakening to Nature , Charles Cook says:

Nothing is more helpful in connecting with nature than making direct contact with the earth. Something important happens when we physically touch the ground. [. . .] the effect can be deeply reassuring if we're receptive to it. An unmeasurable but unmistakable energy flows into our bodies from the earth, which supports us in a way no other surface can. (55)

The earth is man's abode. In the Qur'an, the earth image emerges as the backdrop against which the drama of man's existence, life, death, resurrection and judgement is enacted. It is the chief setting in the Qur'an. So much so that even heaven and hell are described in terms of natural earthly images.

1.4. THE RESEARCH TOPIC

The topic for the present research is "Nature Imagery in the Qur'an". This is such a vast topic that it would be impossible to encompass it. As nature imagery in the Qur'an occurs chiefly with reference to the earth, the topic of research has been delimited to "Nature Imagery in the Quran with reference to the Earth".

What is the character and general structure of the universe in which we live? Is there a permanent element in the constitution of this universe? How are we related? What place do we occupy in it, and what is the kind of conduct that befits the place we occupy? (1)

These questions posed by Muhammad Iqbal have been asked by man in all ages. The present research addresses some of these questions through Qur'anic verses that allude to the earth from the moral-philosophical, thematic as well as stylistic view-points.

The earth is referred to as “الأرض” in the Qur'an. Muhammad Fu'ad Abd Al-Baqi's Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim lists 461 Qur'anic verses under “الأرض” in its different forms. As each and every word of the Quran deserves attention, therefore the abundance of earth imagery in the Quran must have special significance. This is the area the present research seeks to investigate.

The fact that the earth image recurs so frequently in the Quran is hardly surprising. Quran is the word of God to man and man lives on earth. The Qur'an contains Allah's guidance to man regarding how to live peacefully and successfully on earth.

The earth image reinforces some major themes in the Qur'an such as the Sole Sovereignty of Allah, the relationship between man and God, interpersonal relationships, man's role on earth, the test of his earthly life, corruption on earth as a consequence of violation by man of Allah's law, Jihad, Migration, Resurrection and Judgement, etc.

The Quran presents its major themes by appealing to man's reason as well as emotion. Earth imagery is presented as an argument as well as proof of the Sovereignty of Allah and the Day of Judgement.

Chapter 2 of this thesis contextualizes “nature imagery” with reference to English Literature. It also touches upon nature imagery in Arabic literature. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology adopted for the present research. As Qur'anic verses need to be cited in translated form in the present research, Chapter 4 discusses some issues related to translation. Chapter 5 tries to contextualize this research by reviewing some aspects of the Qur'an discussed by scholars. Chapter 6 gives some general attributes of nature imagery. Chapter 7 highlights certain functions fulfilled by nature imagery in the Qur'an.

From chapter 8 onwards the topic is delimited to earth imagery in the Qur'an. Chapter 8 deals with earth imagery itself. Chapter 9 discusses some forms the earth image assumes. This chapter also discusses a stylistic feature of Qur'anic discourse known as “Iltifat”. Chapter 10 throws light on different dimensions of “Man and Earth” as they appear in the Qur'an.

Chapter 11 shows how the earth image occurs with reference to many of Divine attributes. Chapter 12 focuses on the earth as it appears in the imagery of Doomsday.

Resurrection, Judgement and Life after death in heaven or hell. Chapter 13 gives some suggestions and concludes this research.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise specified, English Translation of the Qur'an is the one rendered by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. (4:174) refers to the 4th verse of the 174th sura. For citation, the standard documentation style of parenthetical referencing recommended by Joseph Gibaldi in MLA Handbook has been followed. 3.2.3 discusses it in greater detail.

CHAPTER 2

NATURE IMAGERY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter attempts to contextualize the concept of nature imagery in Al-Qur'an with reference to the framework of English Literature. It also touches upon nature imagery in Arabic Literature.

2.2. NATURE IMAGERY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Nature¹ has always fascinated man. Since times immemorial, it has nurtured man and acted as both his boon as well as scourge. Consequently, the primitive man held nature in awe and started worshipping it. Greek religion:

appears to have had its source, in part, in the personification by a primitive people of the powers of nature as affecting man, either universal powers (*daimones*, q.v.) such as the earth and its fertility, the sky and its lightning and rain, or the local powers in particular rivers, springs, and tree (for instance *Naiads*, *Dryads*, *Oreads*) [...] (Harvey 358)

Man's feeling of awe and reverence for nature also finds expression in the literature composed by him. Greek, Roman and Hindu mythologies are a testimony of man prostrating himself before different natural forces and phenomena.

Nature appeals to man's aesthetic sense. The history of English literature reveals that there is hardly a poet who has not referred to some aspect of nature in one form or another in his work. Whether one looks at the poetry of Chaucer² or Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman literature, nature imagery³ is evident. In the Elizabethan era, the poetry of Edmund Spenser and Philip Sidney⁴ contains some beautiful nature imagery.

William Shakespeare, the leading playwright and poet of his age, has portrayed the ethical as well as the aesthetic element in nature. From his work, a certain conception of nature emerges where nature and man mutually affect each other. Man, influenced by the

nature around him, attempts to equate the state within i.e. his mental and emotional state with the state without i.e. the season or clime or landscape. Thus in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, King Duncan, owing to the goodness of his own heart and faith in that of others, says on entering Macbeth's castle:

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses. (1. vi.1-3)

On the other hand, Hamlet expresses his disillusionment with life thus:

[...] this goodly frame
The earth seems to me a sterile promontory. This
Most excellent canopy the air – look you, this brave
O'er-hanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted
With golden fire – why it appeareth no other thing
To me than a foul and pestilent congregation of
Vapours [...] (2. ii. 304 – 310)

In Shakespearean world, man also affects nature. After the murder of King Duncan, Macbeth's evil action provokes a severe reaction from nature as evident from the following lines:

[...] the heavens, as troubled with man's act,
Threaten his bloody stage: by th' clock, 't is day,
And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp:
Is 't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it?

The answer to the query is given in the next lines:

'T is unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done. (2. iv. 5-11)

Thus it appears that what is natural is that which is good and virtuous. Nature, hence, is endowed with a moral sense. According to A.C. Bradley, in the Shakespearean world "[...] the tragic suffering and death arise from collision, not with a fate or blank power, but with a moral power" (26).

Milton, the leading poet of the Restoration era, exhibits the same philosophy. Nature reacts against evil deeds. When Eve disobeys God and eats the forbidden fruit, the garland of roses Adam had prepared for her withers in his hand:

From his slack hand the garland wreathed for Eve
Down dropped, and all the faded roses shed. (892-93)

When Adam eats the forbidden fruit, the enormity of his sin is highlighted thus:

Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
 In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan;
 Sky loured and, muttering thunder, some sad drops
 Wept at completing of the mortal sin
 Original; (1000-1004)

The poets of the so-called Augustan or Classical period in the eighteenth century also believed in the inherent goodness of nature. In the words of Pope, the representative poet of the Augustan period, Nature is:

At once the source, and end, and test of Art.

Therefore, he advises:

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame
 By her just standard, which is still the same.

The focus of Augustan poets was more on human nature than external Nature. External nature, in their opinion, had to be refined by art. Their verse was chiefly societal verse. They strove to show the universal rather than the particular. However, as David Daiches says, the Augustan poets were not “indifferent to the beauties of nature, and throughout the eighteenth century is found a strain of descriptive and meditative poetry in which natural description prompts moral reflections on the human situation” (652).

Nature as the chief subject and setting for poetry gathered force and reached its culmination with William Wordsworth who in his Lyrical ballads declared it a fit subject for poetry. According to Joseph Warren Beach:

English and American poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as European poets of the same period, were fond of personifying Nature – or the virtually equivalent Earth – [...] Most often this use of the word nature grew out of the poets’ desire to associate the “beauteous forms” of the out-of-doors world with the laws and order of the universe, reinforcing the aesthetic pleasure derivable from these beautiful forms with the philosophical notion of order and unity and vice versa. (4)

According to Beach, this love of Nature grew as a hybrid of two opposing elements – science and religion. The idea that nature is inherently good, that it is a manifestation of God is traceable to Christianity. The fact that it is supported by universal laws was supported by both contemporary science (as manifest by the laws of Newton) as well as religion. With the Romantic poets, the love of Nature became a Cult, a sort of substitute religion. The younger generation of Romantic poets i.e. Byron and Shelley spurned Christianity and turned to Nature in their quest for a philosophy of life.

As the focus of poetry shifted from reason to emotion and imagination, the Romantic man emerged as an individual, and not as a social and rational being. While Pope could say in his Essay on Man:

The proper study of mankind is man (269)

Romantic poetry showed man in isolation and solitude, in communion with nature itself. His quest for nature was, in fact, a self-quest. He thought of nature as a manifestation of his own moods, desires, passions, longings, fears and aspirations. Even wild, uncontrolled nature stirred a chord within him. From the natural to the supernatural was but a step. In fact, the Romantic reached for the unreachable; he looked for the infinite in the finite; for the ideal in the real. William Blake, who was a Romantic before the Romantics, has this to say:

To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.

It is this sensibility which earned for the Romantic period the name of the “Renascence of wonder” by Watts-Dunton. Man looked at everything with new eyes. There was a desire to explore that which had never been explored before; be it the hidden caves of nature or the hidden caverns of human mind. The interest in the supernatural, the irrational, the demoniac, the fanciful manifests this desire. According to The New Encyclopaedia Britannica

Nature in the post-Newtonian world became a system of intelligible forces that grew as the complexity of matter was explored and the diversity of particular species discovered. [...] along with the new view of the universe grew belief in the idea of a benign Providence, which could be trusted because it was visibly active in the world. (679)

Such thinking influenced men like Lord Shaftesbury, David Hartley, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau who sought in nature “the primal condition of innocence in which man was whole” (Britannica 679). Under the influence of such thinking, Wordsworth believed nature to be divine. In the Tintern Abbey, he traces how his mind was shaped by nature which he calls:

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (112-114)

His belief was:

[...] Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her (126-27)

Wordsworth proclaims himself “a worshipper of nature” and clothes his love of nature in the garb of religious language when he proclaims in The Prelude:

That spirit of religious love in which
I walked with nature. (ii, 376-77)

Nature becomes a symbol for the Romantics. It expresses their yearning for a Higher Ideal of Reality. For Wordsworth, it finds expression in his pantheism⁵, for Keats in his cult of Beauty while Shelley’s whole being fuses with nature when he addresses the West Wind:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My Spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

According to Emile Legouis:

The Romantics, relying on imagination, and convinced of the absolute truth of poetic intuitions, substituted for the cold mechanism of cause and effect a vision of mysterious forces which they called divine. They repudiated deism for a faith which is sometimes pantheism, sometimes mysticism. (277)

The Romantics loved nature in all its manifestations, whether wild or serene. They admired the order and harmony, balance and beauty, evident in nature as much as the Classical poets. No matter how divergent these two schools in their thinking and poetry, they manifest the continuation of the same sensibility regarding their belief in the benevolence of “Nature”.

Such a view of nature, however, disintegrates with the Victorian poets under the onslaught of scientific and philosophical thought of the day (such as Darwin’s *Origin of Species*) as well as the grim reality of political and social conditions. The Nature portrayed by the Victorians is harsh and merciless. William Henry Hudson, analyzing the nature poetry of Alfred Tennyson says:

He studied nature as closely and knew it as well as Wordsworth, and, like Wordsworth, he was always absolutely faithful in his rendering of even the minutest details. But Wordsworth had seen nature with the eye of the poet only, while Tennyson saw it with the eye of the scientist as well. He loved its beauty but he also saw its indifference and cruelty. (231)

The landscapes in Hardy reflect nature's cruelty and indifference towards man's pitiful condition. Discussing Hardy's treatment of nature, Daiches says:

Nature can be not only a symbol of man's environment with which he must at the same time continually wrestle and be fundamentally in tune; it also reveals the inadequacy of the way in which the world is governed.(1078)

The above is a brief outline of the history of nature imagery in English literature. The significant point here is that man's view of nature is emotionally coloured by his faith in a Higher Reality who is beneficent to him. Nature, as a manifestation of this Higher Reality, is also considered benign. With the Romantics, such a view of Nature reaches its culmination. From the time of Chaucer to the time of Wordsworth, there is evidence of a religious sensibility. As faith in Christianity wavers, Nature becomes a sort of substitute religion. In the case of Victorian poets, though faith in God is there, yet the view of nature as a benevolent force has disappeared to leave an emotional vacuum. In most twentieth century writers, there is a feeling of hopelessness, unrelieved by either faith or nature⁶. In the words of Beach:

In the twentieth century poetry the term and concept of nature have virtually ceased to appear. One reason is that the religious elements in the concept – purposiveness, benevolence, etc. – are no longer assumed to be true, and so the word nature has lost most of its emotional force. (8)

2.3. NATURE IN AL-QUR'AN

If one looks at the nature imagery of Al-Qur'an after taking a look at the nature imagery in English literature, one is struck by several similarities as well as differences. First of all, al-Qur'an – no matter how poetic and musical it might be – is a Book for the guidance of mankind. Its addresser is not any man but Allah. Though the narrative style in the Qur'an shows great variety, the greater part of it exhibits the Omniscient as well as the Omnipotent God as the speaking voice. The address is made from a position of power as well as authority. In contrast, in English nature poetry, the poet generally appears as a supplicant before Nature.⁷

Nature in al-Qur'an appears as a sign and manifestation of the Creator. It is not personified as a "Power" independent of Allah. There is no pantheism, no concept of "nature worship" in the Qur'an as nature is there for the service of mankind. It fulfils the functions assigned to it by Allah. As such nature presents before man a model of obedience. One of the Divine attributes is that Allah is "fatir" i.e. maker or creator⁸.

“Fitra” is generally translated as “nature” in the Qur’an. Every created object acts in accordance with its “fitra” or “nature”. Thus it carries out the function for which it was designed. Such a view is in accord with the Classical view of nature in English Literature.

The Qur’anic view of nature can be summed up in this verse:

And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: behold, in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect. (45:13)

The Qur’anic conception of nature as being subservient to man led to many scientific discoveries by the Muslims⁹ as discussed in 1.1. The Classical as well as the Romantic conception of nature being benign to man, being ordered, balanced, and harmonious, is borne out by the Qur’an and presented as a testimony of the Sole Sovereignty of Allah. If the universe was being governed by more than one God, the end result would have been tumult and cosmic upheaval:

No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him: (if there were many gods), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the (sort of) things they attribute to Him! (23:91)

Nature does turn harsh and merciless towards man (as discussed in 7.1.13., 7.1.15., 10.6., 11.17., 12.2. and 12.4.) as a recompense for man’s injustice and evil deeds. However, the determining element is man’s action based on free will. To put it into other words, it is not nature that is merciless but man who is unjust. The Shakespearean view of nature as a moral force is, therefore, in accord with the Qur’anic viewpoint. This view is contrary to the Victorian belief of a merciless nature which breeds in man a feeling of despair. The Qur’an asserts:

We created not the heavens, the earth, and all between them, merely in (idle) sport: (44:38)

Allah created the heavens and the earth for just ends, and in order that each soul may find the recompense of what it has earned, and none of them be wronged. (45:22)

In the present research, the topic has been delimited to “nature Imagery in al-Qur’an w.r.t the earth”. The personified “earth” is frequently employed by many poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who used it as a substitute for Nature (Beach 4).

According to Ellen Douglas Leyburn, “the ‘religion of Nature’ to which Wordsworth attained rested upon the idea of the earth as the visible language of God” (117-18).

An interesting similarity is that the Earth – generally personified by the poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – is also personified in the Qur’an. A detailed discussion in this context occurs in 8.3.

2.4. QUR’AN, NATURE IMAGERY AND ARABIC LITERATURE¹⁰

Qur’an, the literary master piece of Arabic, had far-reaching influence on Arabic literature. First of all, the literary tradition switched from oral to written due to the Muslims’ desire to preserve everything related, whether directly or indirectly, to the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Many disciplines came into being like lexicography, exegesis, rhetoric, grammar, geography, historiography, etc. Since the Qur’an presents the perfect literary model, “its imagery not unexpectedly permeates all Islamic poetry and prose” (“Islamic Arts” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 46). Its language became the yardstick to measure every literary attempt. Consequently, for centuries, Classical Arabic was used to compose all literature.

To be influenced by nature is natural to man. Descriptions of nature are found even in the Arabic poetry of the pre-Islamic period where “imagery is precise, and descriptions of natural phenomena are detailed” (*Britannica* 49). Amongst the poets of that era, Labid says in the opening lines of his *Mu’allaqah* poem:

Sites dung-stained and long abandoned after times of frequentation, with
their changing seasons of peace and war,
Fed with spring rains of the stars, hit by the thunder of a heavy rainstorm
or fine drizzle,
Falling from every passing cloud, looming dark in the daytime and with
thunder resounding at eventide. (Allen 8)

Amongst the poetry that was written after the advent of Islam, the mystic poetry of Sufis is important. It expresses the poet’s yearning of a reunion with Allah – the beloved. As the Sufis took their inspiration from the Qur’an, their poetry abounds in Qur’anic images. According to Annemarie Scimmel, “this life in and through the Koran helped the mystics shape both their experiences and their languages” (16). Husain ibn mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922) says:

O Sun, Full Moon, and Day –
You are for us Paradise and Hellfire!

Since the mystic sees God everywhere, it is but natural that he draws upon natural images to express his feelings:

Verily the sun of the day sets at night,
But the sun of the heart never disappears. (qtd. by Scimmel, 31)

The Qur'anic imagery of paradise as a garden is echoed in Sufi mystic poetry. The following lines by Umar Ibn al-Farid¹¹ might be said to echo the romantic pantheism of Wordsworth:

Every limb (of my body) sees him, even if he be absent from me, in every delicate, clear, joyous essence:
In the tune of the melodious lute and flute when they blend together in trilling strains,
And in luxurious pasturage of gazelles in the coolness of twilight and in the first rays of dawning,
And in misty rains falling from a cloud on a carpet woven of flowers,
And where the breeze sweeps her train, guiding to me most fragrant attar at sweet dawn,
And when I kiss the lip of the cup, sipping the clear wine in pleasure and joy,
I knew no estrangement from my homeland when he was with me; my mind was undisturbed where we were –
That place was my home while my beloved was present; when the sloping dune appeared, that was my halting place...(qtd. by Scimmel, 43)

Arabic and English Literature have been influenced by each other. It is interesting to note that Sufi poetry via Spain influenced the medieval European literature. Alice E. Lasater traces the influence of Arabic Sufi poetry on Dante's *Commedia* and the fourteenth century Middle English poem *Pearl*.

According to her:

In a considerable amount of later medieval literature, i.e., that of the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, the line between Christian and Islamic motifs, between European and Arab-Persian stories, was not always as distinct as it perhaps is today. (6)

Arabic literature came under the influence of the West in the nineteenth century. Translations provided examples of genres previously unknown like short story, novel and drama. In the twentieth century, during the twenties and the thirties, some influence of romanticism is also evident. Khalil Mutran (died 1949) "adopted a more subjective approach to expressive lyricism. Thus, he can be said to have inaugurated an era of 'Romantic' poetry" ("Islamic Arts" *Britannica* 61). Ahmed Shawqi found in nature "scope for his lyricism, as in this fanciful description of the moon rising over water"(Cachia 153):

With glitter he adorns the seas:
Theirs are the cups and his the bubbles.

He lights the highlands as he ascends,
He lights the plains as he regresses.

Kahlil Gibran (1882- 1931), a Christian Lebanese, was in the forefront of the Romantic stream. He also expresses his delight in nature:

Have you, of an afternoon,
Sat like me among the vines,
With the clusters overhanging
Like golden constellations? (Cachia 158)

Nature was a retreat and a refuge but harsh reality soon intruded. By the late 1940s, “free verse” became the norm. Under French and English influence, “Arabic poetry has at last freed itself completely from the fetters of classical tradition” (“Islamic Arts” *Britannica* 63). It expresses the socio-cultural and political problems of the day. Qur’anic allusions and images are drawn upon in new ways. The most significant trend is the rise of nationalism. Initially under the influence of T.S. Eliot, the Iraqi poet, Badr Shakir as-Sayyab (d. 1964) employs images drawn from nature to express the theme of nationalism:

On the night of departure how many tears have we shed,
and then for fear of reproach pretended it was rain...
Rain...
Rain...
Since our childhood, the skies
were always cloudy in wintertime,
and rain poured down,
but every year, as the earth blossomed, we stayed hungry,
never a year went by but there was hunger in Iraq.
Rain...
Rain...
Rain...(Allen 8)

A thematic shift occurs from the Romantic to the political in Arabic Literature. Though nature images are still employed, it is the harsh aspect of nature that recalls English Victorian poetry to mind.

2.5. IMAGERY DEFINED

In the research topic “nature Imagery in al-Qur’an”, the term “imagery” needs to be defined. The simplest definition of the term, given by J. A. Cuddon is:

Imagery (L ‘making of likenesses’). Imagery as a general term covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind and any sensory or extra-sensory experience. (442)

This definition is quite general. The definition of imagery given by B. Bernard Cohen is more specific. He says:

The term *imagery* is vital to the study of poetic style and should be used to include both images and figures of speech. An *image* is generally a sense impression created by a direct or recognizable sense appeal in words. Such an appeal should present a description so graphic or clear that the reader can relate it to his own senses or his own experience. (51)

Cohen takes imagery to mean images along with figures of speech where figures of speech are defined by him as:

[. . .] images that are often intentionally indirect; they generally depend on a process of association, the deliberate linking of two elements. Among the possible kinds of figures of speech, five are worth considering in terms of poetic style: allusion, simile, personification, metaphor, and symbol. (51)

Imagery, thus, comprises images along with figures of speech where figures of speech include similes, metaphors, symbol, personification and allusion. In the Qur'an, nature imagery occurs as a symbol, metaphor and personification. It is also incorporated in similes and allusions.

M. H. Abrams defines imagery as follows:

'Imagery' (that is, 'images' taken collectively) is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature, whether by literal description, by allusion, or in the analogues (the vehicles) used in its similes and metaphors. (78)

He further adds that "[. . .] imagery includes auditory, tactile (touch), thermal (heat and cold), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), or kinesthetic (sensations of movement), as well as visual qualities" (79).

Nature imagery in the Qur'an manifests itself in all the above forms i.e. auditory, tactile, thermal, olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic and visual. "الأرض" i.e. the earth, frequently alluded to in the Quran, chiefly constitutes a visual image. Kinesthetic earth imagery also occurs, especially in the depiction of Doomsday and description of punishment or warning that befell nations. Sura 56 and Sura 99 are instances of such usage. Chapter 8 discusses earth imagery in detail.

A Handbook to Literature gives the following definition of an image:

[. . .] an image is a literal and concrete representation of a sensory experience or of an object that can be known by one or more of the senses.
[. . .] The image is one of the distinctive elements of the 'language of art', the means by which experience in its richness and emotional complexity is

communicated, as opposed to the simplifying and conceptualizing processes of science and philosophy. The image is, therefore, a portion of the essence of the meaning of the literary work, never a mere decoration. (Holman and Harmon 248)

According to C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, imagery comprises images in a literal sense, while in a broader sense it also includes symbols, similes and metaphors. (249)

Keeping in mind the above definition by Holman and Harmon, an analysis of earth imagery reveals that it is very much “a portion of the essence of the meaning of the literary work” i.e. the Quran in this case. The number of references to the earth in the Quran (461 references) as well as the diversity of contexts in which they occur, supports this view. Moreover, the earth image occurs in the contexts that form the core message of the Book i.e. the Sole Sovereignty of Allah, Man’s Vicegerency on earth, how to live on earth, Doomsday, Resurrection, Day of Judgement, Jihad, Migration, etc.

Caroline Spurgeon, who did pioneering work on Shakespearean imagery, defines an image as:

The little word-picture used by a poet or prose writer to illustrate, illuminate and embellish his thought. It is a description or an idea, which by comparison or analogy, stated or understood, with something else, transmits to us through the emotions and associations it arouses, something of the ‘wholeness’, the depth and richness of the way the writer views, conceives or has felt what he is telling us.

The image thus gives quality, creates atmosphere and conveys emotion in a way no precise description, however clear and accurate, can possibly do. (9)

Spurgeon also uses the word “image” “to cover every kind of simile”, metaphor, symbol and personification. (7-8)

Nature imagery “illustrate(s), illuminate(s) and embellish(es)” Quranic discourse. It “gives quality” and “creates atmosphere” so that the message of the Qur’an penetrates human psyche¹². This imagery, explicitly or implicitly, deals with the earth. Where heavens are mentioned, it is generally in juxtaposition to the earth.

2.6. RESEARCH FOCUS

As nature imagery in the Qur’an occurs chiefly with reference to the earth, the topic of research has been delimited to “Nature Imagery in the Quran with reference to the Earth”.

The focus of the present research is to show the reader the wide canvas of the earth image in the Qur'an: how it occurs in diverse contexts to reinforce the major themes of the Qur'an (such as Allah's Sovereignty, Resurrection), what the vehicles used are (e.g. simile, metaphor, symbol, personification), what different forms it assumes (oaths, sign passages, rhetorical questions, etc.), what different functions it fulfils (such as persuasion), what its general attributes are (universality, sublimity, appropriateness etc.)¹³. The whole picture emerges only when all these aspects clustered around the central image of "الأرض" are taken together.

The premise of the present research is that an overview of earth imagery in the Quran would add to the insight into the Book of Allah besides showing the earth inhabited by man from a multi-dimensional perspective.

The present research is a humble attempt to present something of the wholeness of the earth image as it emerges from a study of the Quran.

NOTES

1. Amongst the definitions of nature given by The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary are "the whole universe and every created, not man-made thing" as well as "(esp Nature) force(s) controlling the events of the physical world". The discussion in this chapter draws upon both these definitions.
2. For example, the opening lines of The Canterbury Tales depict the spring season as a framework for the pilgrimage to Canterbury.
3. A discussion on imagery follows in the subsequent section.
4. For example, Edmund Spenser's Faerie Queene and Philip Sidney's Arcadia contain nature descriptions.
5. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines "pantheism" as "belief that God is everything and everything is God".
6. It is significant that in American poetry, Robert Frost's nature poetry is a testimony of his deep faith.
7. For example, Shelley's Ode to the West Wind cited above.
8. See 11.4. for a detailed discussion.
9. In Islam, there is no conflict between science and religion.
10. Arabic literature covers a time span of more than fifteen hundred years as it also includes the literature of pre-islamic Arabia. It covers a wide geographical territory in Asia and Africa that is Arabic speaking or where writers have composed in Arabic due to its reverence as the language of the Qur'an. The analysis that follows is, of necessity, brief and sketchy as the outlook of the present research has been determined by English literature. Arabic literature falls outside the domain of this research.
11. A contemporary of Ibn-e-Arabi in the thirteenth century.
12. The significance of imagery and symbolism in the Qur'an is discussed in 5.5.
13. Though chapters 6 & 7 discuss the general characteristics and functions of nature imagery in Al-Qur'an, they are equally applicable for Qur'anic earth imagery.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In Research in Education and the Behavioral Sciences: Concepts and Methods, Emanuel J. Mason and William J. Bramble divide research into different kinds such as historical, descriptive, experimental and quasi-experimental, policy research and evaluation. In addition, descriptive research is broadly classified into quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research uses measurement and statistical principles and models ie “[. . .] quantitative research involves quantification of the phenomena under study” (38). “In contrast with quantitative research, qualitative inquiry tends to emphasize meaning and context more than specific findings in the form of facts or a particular element of knowledge” (334).

The present research might be termed as “qualitative research”. As it pertains to the Qur’an, it employs two principles of “balagha” (Arabic rhetoric), discussed by Muhammad Abdel Haleem in his book Understanding the Quran: Themes and Style. These are “context” and “internal relationships”. The principle of context implies that the selection and presentation of material in Al-Quran depends on the context in which it occurs. Thus, in various references to the same object and incident in the Qur’an, different aspects are highlighted every time. According to the principle of internal relationships, the Qur’an is self-referential. Thus, to get the whole picture of any concept, object or incident, all references to it in the Qur’an should be kept in mind.

3.2. “الأرض” IN THE QUR’AN

Nature imagery in the Qur’an constitutes a very vast topic. It has been delimited for the present research to the earth imagery in the Quran.

The researcher has extracted from the Qur'an verses where the word "الأرض" occurs. "الأرض" is generally translated by Commentators and Translators as the "earth". It is also translated as "land", "soil" and "ground". In the present research, chiefly the verses containing the word "الأرض", either alone or in compound form, have been referred to. However, due to the very large number of such verses, the present research does not refer to all of them in order to avoid repetition. Moreover, the translation of "الأرض", whether it has been translated as "earth", "land", "soil" or "ground", has been highlighted to draw attention to its significance in the quoted verses.

There are words other than "الأرض" in the Qur'an that are also translated as the "earth" eg "البر" in (17:67), (17:68) and (17:70). These have not been focused upon in the present research. Similarly, words other than "الأرض" used for "land", "soil" and "ground" in the Qur'an, have not been focused upon eg "الحرث" in (3:14), "بلد" in (35:9) and "البلاد" in (3:196) have been translated as land. Similarly, other words used for soil are "ثراب" in (2:264) and "الترى" in (20:6).

At times, after "الأرض" has been mentioned in a verse, the next verse contains the pronoun "ها" which refers to it. However, due to the considerations of delimitation, such verses where "الأرض" itself does not occur have generally not been used. An instance of such occurrence is (20:55) where "الأرض" is referred to thrice, twice by "منها" and once by "فيها":

He Who has, made for you the **earth** like a carpet spread out; has enabled you to go about therein by roads (and channels); and has sent down water from the sky." With it have We produced diverse pairs of plants each separate from the others. (20:53)

Eat (for yourselves) and pasture your cattle: verily, in this are Signs for men endued with understanding. (20:54)

From **the (earth)** did We create you, and into **it** shall We return you, and from **it** shall We bring you out once again. (20:55)

The translator has used the word "earth" here to clarify meaning though "الأرض" itself does not occur in (20:55).

In a research of this sort, some repetition is inevitable. In the Qur'an, the earth image occurs so repeatedly and with such fine differences in perspective, that there might appear to be some repetition in this thesis. Some verses, for instance, have been quoted more than once. However, every time the perspective is different.

Al-Quran is a book whose depth as well as breadth is outside human ken. The challenge confronting the present researcher is compounded by the fact that a compromise has to be effected between depth and breadth. If the breadth is focused upon, the depth becomes out of reach or vice versa. As the researcher is focusing chiefly on breadth, no aspect touched upon here can be shown in depth. For one thing, as already stated, it is beyond any human being to do so. Secondly, the subject is so vast, that if it is treated depth-wise, the present thesis would comprise many volumes.

3.2.1. Context

What is context? The concept of context might be understood from the words of R. H. Robins who says:

Part of the total meaning of many words in all languages is to be determined by their individual relations with other words, in both the basic dimensions of linguistic analysis, syntagmatic and paradigmatic. (67)

The study of context in the determination of meaning gained importance in the twentieth century chiefly due to the research of Bronislaw Malinowski and J. R. Firth. Malinowski, an anthropologist, felt that language cannot be divorced from its culture and environment. Therefore, he introduced the concept of 'context of situation'. Firth developed a contextual theory of meaning which was of considerable importance in Britain as

Starting from the axiomatic conception of language as meaningful activity, Firth extended the treatment of meaning as function in a context to the other levels of linguistic analysis, namely those of linguistic form, in particular grammar and phonology. [...] Essentially, in this theory, meaning is defined as the function of some linguistic form or element in a context. (Robins 42)

The significance of context in understanding discourse is one of the chief concerns of modern linguistics. In Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature H. G. Widdowson analyses how literary expression deviates from the everyday use of language yet is still comprehensible due to its context. He remarks:

[...] linguistic deviations do not occur randomly in a literary work but pattern in with other linguistic features, both regular and irregular, to form a whole. They are understood, therefore, not in isolation with reference only to the linguistic system, or code, but also with reference to the context in which they appear. (27)

This headway in Linguistics has been made chiefly in the twentieth century. The scholars of the Qur'an, on the other hand, coined these principles many centuries back.

As Haleem says:

One of the most important contributions of scholars of *Balagha* was their recognition of the concept of *maqam* (the context of the situation) and its role in determining the utterance and providing the criterion for judging it. A central issue in *'ilm al-ma'ani* is *mutabaqat al-kalam li-muqtada'l-hal* (the conformity of the utterance to the requirements of the situation). (159)

He further says:

The importance of context (*maqam*) was recognized and formulated for the study of the text of the Quran by Muslim linguists whose work in this respect anticipated by many centuries modern linguistic thinking about the crucial importance of context in understanding discourse. (158)

Depending on the context, “الأرض” ie “the earth” assumes more than one meaning in the Qu’ran. For example, it can function as a figure of speech such as a personification. According to Widdowson, personification results from the synthesis of two kinds of meanings: “that which inheres in linguistic items as elements of the code” along with “that which linguistic items assume when they appear in contexts of use” (33). Thus when “الأرض” is mentioned in the Qur’an, it stands for the inanimate earth on which we live but in certain contexts, it acquires the additional dimension of living, dying, obeying and praising Allah ie it is personified to drive home certain realities like Resurrection and Judgement. “الأرض” also emerges as a symbol in various contexts ie along with its concrete existence it informs of a “Higher Reality”- that of its Creator. It functions metaphorically in some verses. A number of similes in the Quran also employ the earth image. Moreover, “الأرض” occurs as a visual, auditory, olfactory, kinaesthetic as well as gustatory image.

Along with the figurative use of “الأرض”, there is also its extensive literal use in the Quran. It occurs in various contexts like Allah’s Sovereignty without partners, Man’s vicegerency, Doomsday, Migration, etc. Many Divine Attributes employ the earth image. The earth image, thus, goes on gathering more and more connotations. An overview of earth imagery in the Quran adds to insight into the Book of Allah. It also shows the earth inhabited by man from a multi-dimensional perspective.

In al-Qur’an, depending on the context, the same word assumes different meanings. Moreover, the same word used in different contexts helps to link different Qur’anic

themes. How Qur'an employs vocabulary in accordance with the context has been discussed in 5.9. and 6.6.

3.2.2. Internal Relationships

Haleem says:

[. . .] a most relevant and fruitful approach to understanding the text of the Quran is by means of two key concepts developed by Muslim scholars in the Classical period : context and internal relationships [. . .] Internal relationships were encapsulated in the dictum : *al-Qur'an yufassir ba'duhu ba'da* (some parts of the Quran explain others) – in modern linguistic terms 'intertextuality' – which, given the structure of the Quranic material, was argued to provide the most correct method of understanding the Qu'an. (158)

Haleem uses "inter-textuality" as a synonym for "internal relationships" in the Qur'an which means that the Qur'an is self-referential. He does not mean that Qur'an needs to be studied with reference to other texts. Thus his concept is distinct from the structuralist concept of "inter-textuality" according to which:

A work can only be read in connection with or against other texts, which provide a grid through which it is read and structured by establishing expectations which enable one to pick out salient features and give them a structure. (Culler 139)

"Inter-textuality" has been employed by Julia Kristeva as a deconstruction technique according to which "our understanding of a text will always take place with reference to other texts. [...] Crucially, none of these complementary texts possesses either the power or the authority to direct us towards a 'correct' interpretation"(Wright 34). This position is in contradiction with the Muslim viewpoint where the Qur'an is interpreted in the light of ahadith ie the sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) which do lead towards a "correct interpretation".

Keeping in mind the self-referential nature of the Qur'anic text, references to the earth pertaining to a single theme in the Qur'an have been grouped together. This allows for a better understanding of any given theme in the Quran. However, not all themes embodying the earth image could be dealt with. Some are just touched upon. Moreover, not all the references in the Quran to the earth under any theme could always be cited. This is due to the very large number of references pertaining to some themes eg Allah's attributes.

3.2.3. Other Aspects of the Present Research

The Qur'an is divided into 114 chapters each of which is called a "sura". These are of varying length. According to Farid Esack: "The word '*sura*', literally means 'row' or 'fence' and appears nine times in the Qur'an. It seems to denote both a section or chapter and revelation itself" (59). Each sura comprises a number of "a'yaat" [sing. "ayat"] of varying length. "*Ayaat* are the shortest divisions of the Qur'an and the word is usually rendered as 'verses', although they may also be understood as 'phrases' or 'passages'" (Esack 57).

In this thesis, while referring to any verse of a sura, the sura number is mentioned before the verse number, separated by a colon and the whole is enclosed in parenthesis. Thus (2:1) would mean the first verse of the second sura.

For citation, the style recommended for end-notes in the MLA Handbook has been followed which states:

In MLA documentation style, you acknowledge your sources by keying brief parenthetical citations in your text to an alphabetical list of works that appears at the end of the paper. (Gibaldi 114)

Thus "(Gibaldi 114)" means that the information was derived from page 114 of a work by an author named Gibaldi. The "Works Cited" at the end of the chapter would give the name of the book and other relevant information under the name "Gibaldi".

In this research as far as possible Quran itself has been cited (in translation). Citing translated verses from the Holy Text would make it easier for the reader to draw conclusions for himself. Abd-ullah Yusuf Ali's translation has been used. In places the translations rendered by Marmaduke Pickthall, Mohammad Asad, Abdul Majid Daryabadi and Mohammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan have also been given for the sake of clarity and richness of interpretation. Chapter 4 discusses this aspect of the present research.

The present research is just a humble attempt on the part of the researcher. It rests on the work done by such scholars as Ali, Pickthall, Asad, Daryabadi, Qutb, Moududi, Haleem, Von Denffer, Abd al-Rahman Doi, etc. to name just a few. It also refers to the work of Richard Bell and Theodor Nöldeke, besides other Orientalists, chiefly with a view to give a more balanced picture as well as answer some of the arguments raised by them.

As a student of English literature, the perspective of the researcher has been determined by her field of study. Consequently, some key terms in the present research such as “imagery”, “personification”, “symbol”, “simile” and “metaphor”, etc. owe their usage to English literature.

There are a lot of quotations in this thesis. This is due to the nature of the subject chosen. Extensive citation of Qur’anic verses containing the earth image was inevitable. Moreover, comments made on them by different scholars had to be cited. Due to the delicate nature of the subject, the researcher has relied heavily on what the scholars, who have spent their lives researching the Quran, have said about any verse. Their exact words have been quoted where possible.

In spite of the abundance of translations and interpretations, the present research draws chiefly on the work done in this field by a few eminent scholars. There is hardly a scholar of the Quran some part of whose work has not given rise to controversy. However, an endeavour has been made to quote scholars who are the most esteemed. Also, an effort has been made to rely on the work done directly in English and avoid translations of the translations of al-Qur’an as in such a case, the problems related to translation and interpretation are compounded. Some of the problems related to translation have been discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION

4.1. TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic. Theologically, it is the Arabic version that is considered the true Qur'an, the direct word of God, and read in acts of worship. No translation is considered to be the Qur'an or word of God as such, and none has the same status as the Arabic. Translations are considered by the Muslims merely as renderings of meanings of the Qur'an. (Haleem 8)

One of the decisions to be made by the researcher was which translation to use. As Haleem points out none of the translations of Quran is "the Quran" i.e. "the direct word of God". Mohammad Khalifa says:

Comparing any translation with the original Arabic is like comparing a thumbnail sketch with the natural view of a splendid landscape rich in color, light and shade, and sonorous in melody. The Arabic vocabulary as used in the Quran conveys a wealth of ideas with various subtle shades and colors impossible to express in full with a finite number of words in any other language.

One problem regarding translation is that it is inextricably intertwined with interpretation. Doi remarks that "when translations are rendered, the result is some kind of 'interpretation' of the text, since it is never possible for a translation to be an exact one-to-one transference from one language to another" (187). How different translated versions can be is evident from the following four translations of (7:96):

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَٰكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

Marmaduke Pickthall translates it as:

And if the people of the townships had believed and kept from evil, surely
We should have opened for them blessings from the sky and from the

earth. But (unto every messenger) they gave the lie, and so We seized them on account of what they used to earn. (7:96)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali's version states:

If the people of the towns had but believed and feared Allah, We should indeed have opened out to them (All kinds of) blessings from heaven and earth; but they rejected (the truth), and We brought them to book for their misdeeds. (7:96)

Abdul Majid Daryabadi translates it as:

And had the people of those townships believed and feared, We would of a surety have opened up to them blessings from the heaven and the earth; but they belied, wherefore We laid hold of them for that which they had been earning. (7:96)

Mohammad Asad's version reads:

Yet if the people of those communities had but attained to faith and been conscious of Us, We would indeed have opened up for them blessings out of heaven and earth: but they gave the lie to the truth – and so We took them to task through what they [themselves] had been doing. (7:96)

In the verse above, “وَاتَّقُوا” is translated by Pickthall as “and kept from evil”; Ali as “and feared Allah”; Daryabadi as “and feared” while Asad as “and been conscious of Us”. Here Pickthall and Daryabadi give a more literal translation. In Ali's translation “and feared Allah”, “Allah” does not appear in the original Arabic though it is the implied meaning. Similarly, Asad's version “and been conscious of Us” is more interpretational than literal.

The above discussion has focused on the translation of just one word of the verse. If these translations are compared word for word, similar differences emerge. May be the most marked difference is observed in the translation of “فَاخْتَنَاهُمْ”. This has been translated as “so We seized them”, “We brought them to book”, “wherefore We laid hold of them” and “so We took them to task”. If the translated expressions are analyzed further in the light of Dictionary definitions, it is seen that there is considerable difference in meaning. For example, The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines “to take someone to task” as “rebuke or criticize someone” which might be considered rather a mild meaning in the above context.

Differences in translation are also apparent in the use of articles. Does “heaven and earth” mean the same as “the heaven and the earth”? Similarly, different diacritics have been used by different translators. Does it not change meaning in any way?

In reading any text, one needs to read between the lines. In the case of translation, the translator might try to help the reader by giving the implied meaning as well. According to Susan Bassnett, “the translator, then, first reads/translates in the SL and then, through a further process of decoding, translates the text into the TL language” (83).

In the above example, Ali’s translation of “وَاتَّقُوا” as “and feared Allah” (where “Allah” is not in the original text) illustrates this point. Similarly, in the translation of “بَرَكَاتٍ” as “blessings”, he interposes “(all kinds of)”. He translates “كَذَّبُوا” as “they rejected (the truth)”.

Pickthall translates this expression as “they gave the lie” and Daryabadi as “they belied”. Pickthall however interposes “(unto every messenger)” which is his interpretation of this verse. In contrast, Asad’s translation reads as “they gave the lie to the truth” though “the truth” does not appear in the original Arabic. Basil Hatim and Ian Mason throw light on this issue in these words:

While in translating sacred texts translators will often wish to reflect the letter of the source text, they will also want to ensure as far as possible the retrievability by target text readers of what they perceive to be the intended effects of the source text. (125)

From the four different translations of (7:96) discussed above, it is obvious that even in the translation of a single word or phrase, the translator has to act as interpreter. This is borne out by Ali who says: “In choosing an English word for an Arabic word, a translator necessarily exercises his own judgement, and may be unconsciously expressing a point of view, but that is inevitable” (xii).

In Quran, reference-switching occurs quite frequently to fulfill certain rhetorical functions. (For a detailed analysis of reference-switching, see *Iltilaf* in 9.8.). Hatim and Mason define reference-switching as “the rhetorically-motivated change from use of an expected, norm-upholding linguistic form (pronoun, tense, gender or definiteness markers, etc.) to one which is expectation defying” (222). According to them:

From the perspective of translation, these rhetorical purposes and their linguistic realization, together with underlying motivations, are extremely important issues. Even if it were always possible, preserving source text form would be futile unless the function which the form is intended to serve were relayed at the same time. In cases of mismatch, intervention on the part of the translator becomes necessary, with the aim of explaining the discrepancy and communicating the added meanings. (114)

Technically speaking, the translator needs to use “compensation” which is “a procedure for dealing with any source text meaning (ideational, interpersonal and/or textual) which cannot be reproduced directly in the target language” (Hatim and Mason 115).

4.2. LOSS OF ECONOMY OF EXPRESSION

Attention must be drawn to another aspect of translation. This is the loss of the economy and compactness of the original Arabic text. If one looks at the first part of the above verse “وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا”, there are eight words in it. Its translations are as follows:

Pickthall:

“And if the people of the townships had believed and kept from evil”
(13 words).

Ali:

“If the people of the towns had but believed and feared Allah”
(12 words).

Daryabadi:

“And had the people of those townships believed and feared”
(10 words).

Asad:

“Yet if the people of those communities had but attained to faith and been conscious of Us”
(17 words).

Here the minimum number of words has been employed by Daryabadi which is ten and maximum by Asad which is seventeen i.e. more than twice the number in the original text. Asad himself says that he has “[. . .] endeavoured to circumscribe every Qur’anic concept in appropriate English expressions – an endeavour which has necessitated the use of whole sentences to convey the meaning of a single Arabic word” (vi).

Thus, it naturally follows that in all translations the beauty and economy of the original Arabic is lost along with its music. Even then some meaning might not have been captured. As Haleem says while commenting on Sura Al-Fatiha:

The choice of words and structures allows for remarkable multiplicity of meaning difficult to capture in English. All existing translations show considerable loss of meaning. (23)

4.3. TRANSLATION AND SUPRA-SEGMENTALS OF LANGUAGE

The sound qualities of every living language are important. Meaning resides not just in words but also the sound of words. Tone, intonation, stress, pitch, pauses, the supra-

segmentals of oracy, all play a role in this regard. In the case of Qur'an, these aspects are of vital importance as its recitation is an indispensable part of the daily prayers of Muslims. In translation, therefore, some meaning is of necessity lost as the supra-segmentals of oracy are non-transferable.

4.4. TRANSLATION OF METAPHORIC EXPRESSIONS

Language is not something static. In order to appeal to the reader, the translation has to be idiomatic. However, the idioms of the target language itself go on changing. That is why new translations appear in every age. The translation of figurative expressions employing similes and metaphors pose special difficulty in this regard. Dagut remarks about the translation of metaphor as follows:

Since a metaphor in the SL is, by definition, a new piece of performance, a semantic novelty, it can clearly have no existing 'equivalence' in the TL: what is unique can have no counterpart. (qtd. in Bassnett, 31)

In the following verse (6:71):

قُلْ أَدْعُو مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنْفَعُنَا وَلَا يَضُرُّنَا وَنُرَدُّ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ كَالَّذِي اسْتَهْوَتْهُ
الشَّيَاطِينُ فِي الْأَرْضِ حَيْرَانًا لَهُ أَصْحَابٌ يَدْعُونَهُ إِلَى الْهُدَىٰ امْتَثِلْنَا قُلْ إِنَّ هُدَى اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ وَأَمْرًا
لُنُسَلِّمَ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

The translation of the figurative expression “كَالَّذِي اسْتَهْوَتْهُ الشَّيَاطِينُ فِي الْأَرْضِ حَيْرَانًا” is a case in point. Ali's translates this expression as “like one whom the evil ones have made into a fool, wandering bewildered through the earth”; Pickthall translates it as “like one bewildered whom the devils have infatuated in the earth”. Asad translation reads “like one whom the satans have enticed into blundering after earthly lusts”. He gives the literal interpretation as “whom the satans have enticed with lusts on earth, [rendering him] bewildered, [while] he has companions who call him into guidance” (182). Daryabadi's translation of this expression is “like unto one whom the Satans have beguiled to wander bewildered in the land”. Even a cursory look would show that there is considerable difference in these translations. As A. Nihamathullah says:

When the source text (i.e., the Qur'an) is one and same, hypothetically speaking, there should not be much room for variations either between a particular translation and the original or between the different translations except for minor changes of no great importance. Yet it is found that there

are significant and momentous differences, which cannot be accounted for without referring to the role of the translator, the problems of translation, the principles and procedures of translating and the issues of style.

One problem encountered by the researcher was with reference to (28:81):

فَخَسَفْنَا بِهِ وَبِدَارِهِ الْأَرْضَ فَمَا كَانَ لَهُ مِنْ فِئَةٍ يَنْصُرُونَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُنتَصِرِينَ

This has been translated by Ali in English as:

Then We caused the **earth** to **swallow** him up and his house; and he had not (the least little) party to help him against Allah, nor could he defend himself. (28:81)

Pickthall translates it as:

So We caused the **earth** to **swallow** him and his dwelling-place. Then he had no host to help him against Allah, nor was he of those who can save themselves.

Asad's translation states:

And thereupon We caused the **earth** to **swallow** him and his dwelling; and he had none and nothing to succour him against God nor was he of those who could succour themselves.

The expression "swallow" with reference to the earth constitutes a personification i.e. the earth has been personified in the above translation, imbued with human attributes which, being inanimate, it does not otherwise possess. John Penrice in A Dictionary and Glossary of the Kor-an defines "خَسَفَ" as "to bury one beneath the earth, cause the earth to swallow up".

The Urdu translations of the above verse are akin to Daryabadi's version which states:

Then We **sank** the **earth** with him and his dwelling-place. And he had no host to defend him against Allah, nor was he of those who could defend themselves.

Only the scholars of Qur'an can decide as to which translation is closer to the original text. Other verses dealing with the same root word show the same pattern. Some of these other verses are (16:45), (29:40), (34:9), and (67:16).

4.5. OTHER PROBLEMS RELATED TO TRANSLATION

Ali highlights some problems of translation in his preface to The Holy Quran. Many of these problems stem from the passage of time:

- (1) Arabic words in the Text have acquired other meanings than those which were understood by the Prophet and his Companions [. . .]
- (2) Even since the early Commentators wrote, the Arabic language has further developed, and later Commentators often abandon the interpretations of earlier Commentators without sufficient reason [. . .]
- (3) Classical Arabic has a vocabulary in which the meaning of each root word is so comprehensive that it is difficult to interpret it in a modern analytical language word for word, or by the use of the same word in all places where the original word occurs in the Text. (xvi)

Ali gives the example of the word “صَبْرٌ” here which encompasses the following meanings:

- (1) patience in the sense of being thorough, not hasty; (2) patient perseverance, constancy, steadfastness, firmness of purpose; (3) systematic as opposed to spasmodic or chance action; (4) a cheerful attitude of resignation and understanding in sorrow, defeat, or suffering, as opposed to murmuring or rebellion, but saved from mere passivity or listlessness, by the element of constancy or steadfastness. (28)

Another problem Ali mentions is that “the rich vocabulary of the Qur’an distinguishes between things and ideas of a certain kind by special words, for which there is only a general word in English. Instances are Rahman and Rahim (Most Merciful) [. . .]” (xvi)

Haleem highlights another problem of translation. He says that “the early Qur’anic scribes put all the material of one sura together from beginning to end without paragraphing. English translators sometimes fail to see where a section should properly begin and where it ends, and thus they disjoin material that should go together” (11).

Daryabadi also highlights the problems of translation in the preface to his Tafsir-ul-Qur’an. According to him the structure and genius of Arabic and English are very different. He highlights:

1. Problems arising from the “comparative poverty of English language in many respects”:
 - a. A large number of verbs in Arabic cannot be translated as verbs in English but require a combination of words.
 - b. In Arabic present and future tenses both are denoted by the same verb but not so in English.

- c. Unlike English, Arabic contains a dual number in addition to the singular and the plural.
 - d. The feminine plural in the second and third person are distinguishable from the masculine in Arabic.
2. Repetition of synonyms for the sake of emphasis in Arabic can be of literary merit and beauty. Thus, a literal translation might read as "Verily, We! We! We! Quicken the dead". Many expressions can, therefore, be only partly translated.
 3. In the finest Arabic style ellipses occur where words and phrases have to be supplied by the reader to make sense complete. The translator, therefore, has to supply the omission.
 4. In Arabic, there can be abrupt grammatical transitions of person or number in the same sentence.
 5. A personal or relative pronoun can have different antecedents in one and the same sentence. The translator cannot allow such ambiguities.
 6. There is no real equivalence in the import of many of the Arabic and English words generally held to be synonyms.

4.6. ABSOLUTE UNTRANSLATABILITY OF THE QUR'AN

From the above discussion it emerges very clearly that the Quran is untranslatable. Scholars term it as *ajjaz-e-Qur'an* i.e. the inimitability of the Quranic discourse. In terms of linguistics, the principle of Absolute Untranslatability applies to the Qur'an. According to Pickthall:

The Qur'an cannot be translated. [. . .] The Book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Qur'an, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Qur'an- and peradventure something of the charm- in English. It can never take the place of the Qur'an in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so [. . .]

Asad says about the Qur'an:

Unlike any other book, its meaning and its linguistic presentation form one unbreakable whole. The position of individual words in a sentence, the rhythm and sound of its phrases and their syntactic construction, the manner in which a metaphor flows almost imperceptibly into a pragmatic statement, the use of acoustic stress not merely in the service of rhetoric but as a means of alluding to unspoken but clearly implied ideas: all this makes the Qur'an, in the last resort, unique and untranslatable – a fact that has been pointed out by many earlier translators and by all Arab scholars.

Daryabadi says:

[. . .] The difficulty is increased hundredfold when one has to render into English, with any degree of accuracy and precision, a work so rich in meaning, so pithy in expression, so vigorous in style and so subtle in

implications as the Holy Qur'an. To reproduce even partially its exotic beauty, wonderful grandeur and magical vivacity without sacrificing the requirements of the English idiom and usage, is the despair of the translator and an ideal impossible of attainment.

The above are the views of Muslim translators. The view of Arthur J. Arberry, a non-muslim, is not any different. In his preface, he says that he called his translation The Koran Interpreted because he "conceded the relevancy of the orthodox Muslim view. of which Pickthall, for one, was so conscious, that the Koran is untranslatable". Arberry adds that "[. . .] the rhetoric and rhythm of the Arabic of the Koran are so characteristic, so powerful, so highly emotive, that any version whatsoever is bound in the nature of things to be but a poor copy of the glittering splendour of the original" (24).

4.7. WHICH TRANSLATION TO USE?

The use of translation being unavoidable, the question confronting the researcher was which translation to use. In his annotated bibliography published in 1988, A. R. Kidwai lists 35 complete translations of the Quran. There have been many more since then. However, there is not one which can be claimed to be totally error-free. As Haleem says, the "Arabs themselves find English translations of the Qur'an disappointing, unconvincing, and lacking in the cohesion, clarity and grandeur, as well as the rhythm and power of the original Arabic verses" (9). The same view is expressed by Esack:

When the reader unfamiliar with Islam and unversed in Arabic picks up the standard English translation of the Qur'an, that spirit can be hard to find. What the person who learns the Qur'an in Arabic experiences as a work of consummate power and beauty, most outsiders can find it difficult to grasp, confusing, and in most English translations, alienating. (64)

Whatever the short-comings of translations, they are indispensable as for many people they are the only means of understanding the Book of Allah. In his annotated Bibliography, Kidwai gives a critical review of the various English translations of the Qur'an. He says about Pickthall's The Glorious Quran:

At least 27 edns. One of the most widely used translations done by an English man of letters who accepted Islam. Faithfully represents the sense of the original. His use of the Biblical English, however, tends to be a stumbling block for an average reader.

His comments about Ali's The Holy Qur'an are:

At least 35 edns. Another extremely popular translation. Written in style and couched in chaste English, it stands out above other translations as a

highly readable rendering of the Qur'an into English. Copious notes are reflective of Yusuf Ali's vast learning. Nonetheless, some of his notes, particularly, on the Qur'anic eschatology and angelology smack of apologia and pseudo-rationalism.

Kidwai calls Daryabadi's translation "A faithful, though largely unacknowledged, translation". He assesses Ali's The Holy Qur'an as "perhaps the most popular translation". While stating that "the Muslim Scripture is yet to find a dignified and faithful expression in the English language that matches the majesty and grandeur of the original", he concludes:

Till then, the Muslim student should judiciously make use of Pickthall, A. Yusuf Ali, Asad and Irving. Even Arberry's stylistic qualities must not be ignored. Ultimately, of course, the Muslim should try to discover the original and not allow himself to be lost in a maze of translations and interpretations. (A Survey)

4.8. CONCLUSION

The present research relies chiefly on the work of Ali, Pickthall, Asad and Daryabadi. Arberry's version, though considered non-biased amongst the non-muslims translations, has not been referred to. This is because owing to the delicate nature of the subject, the researcher opted to use the translation of the Holy Quran by a Muslim translator. Ali's translation has been used and his notes have been most frequently cited. In spite of criticism against it, his translation appears to have won the most acceptance (at least 35 editions, according to Kidwai, in 1988). After Ali, this research relies on the translations of Pickthall, Asad and Daryabadi as they appear to rank next in general acceptance amongst the English translations. While citing the Quranic verses, the researcher has avoided the translations of translations of the Qur'an, for example, those of Abul A'la Moudoudi and Syed Qutb, as in such a case, the problems highlighted in this chapter increase manifold. However, the interpretations of Qutb and Moudoudi have been referred to where required.

CHAPTER 5

LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1. LITERATURE REVIEW OF QUR'AN – AN IMPOSSIBILITY

The Qur'an is the word of Allah. Allah says in the Glorious Qur'an:

And if all the trees on **earth** were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet would not the words of Allah be exhausted (in the writing): for Allah is Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom. (31:27)

No human being can hope to encompass the depth and width of the Word of Allah i.e. the Qur'an. The literature review of any aspect of the Qur'an is an almost impossible task. This can be gauged from the fact that Zahidul Husaini's Tazkiratul Mufasssireen lists more than 625 commentaries of the Qur'an from the time of the Prophet (pbuh) to the present day. This number does not include commentaries on the Qur'an by the non-muslims. As Ali says:

Qur'anic literature is so voluminous that no single man can compass a perusal of the whole. [. . .] There is no Book in the world in whose service so much talent, so much labour, so much time and money have been expended as has been the case with the Qur'an. (xv)

5.2. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE QUR'AN

If one considers different approaches to the Qur'an, on one side of the spectrum are the different Qur'anic translations and interpretations. On the other are different dictionaries and indices that focus on words in the Qur'an.

In addition, there is a thematic approach to the Qur'an that looks at various themes present in the Book of Allah.

5.2.1. Translations and Interpretations

For the present research, the researcher consulted a number of English translations and interpretations, chiefly those of Ali, Pickthall, Daryabadi and Asad. Their comments on different aspects of the topic under discussion appear in the subsequent chapters. Similarly Urdu translations and interpretations of the Qur'an were consulted where required though they have been little quoted from.

5.2.2. Dictionaries and Indices

Translations and interpretations deal with their subject in a sequential manner i.e. they start with the first verse of the first Sura of the Qur'an and end with the last. If one wants to know what the Qur'an says on any particular subject, it is not always easy to find the relevant verses. This has given rise to many attempts to list the Qur'anic verses on different subjects by means of dictionaries and indices.

Malik divides such dictionaries and indices in three categories:

Firstly, Qur'anic words are arranged alphabetically, sometimes with verse reference, in dictionary-like books such as Ahmed Shah's Miftahul Qur'an (Benaras/1906) and Montgomery Watt's Index (published together with Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an).

Secondly, words, letters and roots of Qur'anic verses are alphabetically arranged along with the related verses like Flugel's Concordantia Corani Arabicae (1842), its Urdu translation Mujumul-Furqan (Ferozpur, 1907), Kazim Beg's Miftah Munuz al-Qur'an (Istanbul-Lahore edition, 1937), and Muhammad Fu'ad Abd al-Baqi's Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim (Cairo, 1378 A.H.). These books, though not arranged subject-wise, are helpful in searching for specific verses.

The third category lists the Qur'anic verses subject-wise like the appendices attached to translations of Pickthall and Ali. This category includes books like Jules la Beaume's Le Koran Analyse, Edward Monet's supplement to above, Fu'ad Abd al-Baqi's Arabic version of the above two works titled Tafsil Ayat al-Qur'an al-Karim (Cairo, 1935), Mumtaz Ali's Tafsil Al-Bayan fi Maqasid al-Qur'an (Lahore, 1348 A.H.), M. Azizud Din's Riyazul Qur'an (Lahore, 1929), etc. Most of these concentrate on theological, historical and purely legal matters.

Malik's Mazameen-e-Qur'an (1980) was part of the attempt to discover what the Qur'an says on any given topic. He listed more than 800 subjects "of immediate relevance to the needs of modern man" (19), excluding theological and historical topics. He compiled a similar book in English called Subjects of Qur'an. According to him:

The present-day problems demand a radically new approach. So the Qur'an must be studied in its entirety, not in parts. One must consult all the relevant verses on a subject, not one or two verses in isolation. (16)

In 2003, The Encyclopaedic Index of the Qur'an compiled by Syed Muhammad Osama appeared. As the name suggests it cites a large number of verses under different Qur'anic words and themes. "By listing similar themes and ideas (which are otherwise spread across different parts in the Qur'an) under headings arranged alphabetically, it seeks to make the Qur'an comprehensible to the beginner" as well as being "an indispensable work of reference" for scholars.

5.2.3. Thematic approach to the Qur'an

In between the translations and interpretations of the Qur'an that look at Allah's book sequentially and the dictionaries, indices and encyclopedias that attempt a categorization of verses word-wise or subject-wise falls the thematic approach to the study of the Qur'an.

Such a thematic approach to the study of Qur'an was undertaken in English by Fazlur Rahman in 1979, who discussed such fundamental themes as God, prophethood and revelation in his book Major themes of the Qur'an. Going a step further, Haleem discussed such themes as "Marriage and Divorce", "War and Peace in the Qur'an", "Life and Beyond", "Paradise in the Qur'an", "The Face, Divine and Human, in the Qur'an" and "Water in the Qur'an", etc. in his book Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style in 1999. He says that "the study of themes in the Qur'an is fairly new in English. This is surprising as it is the only approach that can give a balanced view of what the Qur'an says on any given topic". According to Haleem, he combined "a number of approaches: thematic, stylistic and comparative" in his book (vii).

Haleem based his thematic analysis of Qur'anic verses on two concepts of "balagha" which are "context" and "intertextuality" as discussed in 3.2.1. and 3.2.2. The principle of context implies that the selection and presentation of material in Al-Qur'an depends on the context in which it occurs. In various references to the same object and incident in the

Qur'an, different aspects are highlighted every time. According to the principle of intertextuality, Qur'an is self-referential. Thus, to get the whole picture of any concept, object or incident, all references to it in the Qur'an should be kept in mind. Citing Haleem:

Context, with the expression it demands, and intertextuality both focus our attention on the Qur'anic text itself which must surely take priority over any other approach to understanding and explaining the Qur'an. (162)

5.3. RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT RESEARCH

The two concepts of "balagha", "context" and "intertextuality", expounded by Haleem have been used in this study. The present research is directed to get an overview of earth imagery in the Qur'an, especially as it relates to its other major themes.

Though the abundance of nature imagery in the Qur'an has excited comments from scholars, it has not been discussed as a subject in its own right. Some of the books mentioned above touch on the word "earth" in the Qur'an. For example, Malik's Subjects of the Qur'an lists twenty-one verses under the heading "earth". The Encyclopaedic Index of the Qur'an gives seventy two verses under the same heading. It gives five more references of "ارض" under the heading "land/country".

Al-Baqi's Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim lists 461 Qur'anic references to "الارض" in its different forms. Thus, thirty-four verses are listed under "الارض", eighty-six under "الارض", three hundred and thirty-one under "الارض", two under "ارضاً", three under "ارضكم" and "ارضنا" each, and one under "ارضهم" and "ارضي" each. However, it is a grammatical listing in the order of their occurrence in the Qur'an, without categorization or analysis of any sort with reference to their content.

References to the earth occur in most suras of the Qur'an. What the Qur'anic scholars have said about the various aspects of "الارض" i.e. the "earth" would appear in the subsequent chapters. As their comments were made in relation to four hundred and sixty-one different verses of the Qur'an, it is not possible to present their viewpoint in a consolidated form in this chapter. Rather, this chapter would focus on some other vital aspects related to earth and nature in the Qur'an such as style, imagery, vocabulary, form, musical quality, etc.

As the above discussion shows, many attempts have been made to discover what the Qur'an says on any given subject or theme. Why did such a need arise? This brings into focus a very important aspect of the Qur'an which is that of its organization and style.

5.4. STYLE

A study of the earth theme in the Qur'an directs one's attention to the style of Qur'anic discourse. Not all references to any subject in the Qur'an are grouped together as a chapter. Rather, they are scattered throughout the Qur'an.

One of the most recurrent objections against Qur'anic style is that it is "disjointed". Such criticism has generally been leveled against it by the West. In Islam and the West: the Making of an Image Norman Daniel says that "To several authors the arrangement of the Qur'an seemed disorderly". Tracing the history of anti-Qur'an criticism by the West, he states:

This excessively small-minded carping sprang from a genuine divergence of Western and Eastern traditions. The form and manner of the Qur'an remained always alien to the scholastic age which so specially honoured the systematic classification of arguments. It was supposed that its style gave a strong presumption of its human origin; it was too badly written to be of God. In this way the attitude of the Arab and the Muslim, and the assertion of the Qur'an itself, were exactly reversed. (78)

In his Introduction to the Qur'an Richard Bell says that "[. . .] a real characteristic of Qur'an style. It is disjointed. Only very seldom do we find in it evidence of sustained unified composition at any great length" (72).

The fact that Qur'an moves swiftly in the same sura to different topics perplexes most people. As Bell says:

It is neither a treatise on theology, nor a code of laws, nor a collection of sermons, but rather a medley of all three, with some other things thrown in. (1)

Roger Allen says in An Introduction to Arabic Literature:

The features that, within the tradition of Islamic scholarship, have been considered as contributors to the Qur'an's unique textual qualities have served to bemuse and frustrate many Western readers of the Qur'an. This, no doubt, helps to explain at least in part why the authors of the relatively few studies of the literary aspects of the Qur'an in Western languages have tended to concentrate on those *surahs* and segments that conform with criteria recognizable to Western readers. (58)

In this context Allen gives the example of Sura Yusuf "for its unusual structural unity and narrative qualities".

Many Muslims concede that "The current arrangement of the Qur'an is neither chronological nor thematic. To those accustomed to read in a linear or sequential fashion, this can prove tedious and frustrating". (Esack 64)

However, the general Muslim attitude is summed up in what Osama, the author of The Encyclopaedic Index of the Qur'an, says:

The Glorious Qur'an, is not like an ordinary book where one comes across subjects arranged in a particular order or sequence. Normally in such books, subjects are introduced, analysed, discussed and then commands or directions are issued, if necessary. [. . .] It is a Book which is unique in its presentation and cannot be compared to any other existing book written by men. (3)

Why is there this apparent “disjointedness” in Al-Qur'an? While the Orientalists have criticized this style, the Muslim scholars have extolled the virtues of this approach. Haleem, in Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style, while acceding that the Qur'an is not arranged chronologically or in subject order as it combines a number of subjects like beliefs, rituals, morals and laws, asserts that if all the verses related to one subject were grouped under one heading, “it would not have had the powerful effect it does by using these themes to reinforce its message in various places. The Qur'an is not an academic thesis but a book of guidance and has its own methods of *targhib* (instilling desire) and *tarhib* (instilling fear) so that they act together” (10).

An important element mentioned by Haleem is that it is mainly in translation that cohesion appears to be lacking in the verses. It is because English language has different patterns of cohesion. “Much work has to be done in English on the cohesive devices in the Qur'an as they work in Arabic” (11).

Haleem shows how the Qur'anic style is logical and rational:

[. . .] the Qur'an has an internal logic for developing its material, even though it is not introduced in a scholastic manner. Moreover, the Qur'an always offers justification for its message, supporting it with logical arguments, for example in explaining the unity of God (e.g. 21: 21-2; 23:91; 36:78-83). The Qur'an also supports its statements with reference to the past (the history of earlier nations and prophets), to the present (nature as a manifestation of God's wisdom, power and care) and to the future (life hereafter and Judgement), in addition, of course, to constantly reminding people of God and His attributes [. . .] (12)

Commenting on Bell's assertion of “disjointedness”, Haleem says: “Razi, in his tafsir, always shows the linguistic and logical connection, and if Bell had read him he would have changed his opinion over a vast number of examples in his translation and his commentary on the Qur'an” (11).

Maududi has also answered the criticism on Qur'anic style. According to him, the disjointedness disappears as soon as we focus on the subject, central theme, and the aim

and object of the Book. “The subject it deals with is man: it discusses those aspects of his life that lead either to his real success or failure”. Its theme is “the exposition of Reality and the invitation to the right way based on it. [. . .] The aim and object of the revelation is to invite man to the right way” (13).

Maududi elaborates what this Reality is. The Reality is that man has been created by Allah and sent as His vicegerent on earth in order to be tested. He has been endowed with reason as well as shown guidance through Allah’s books and prophets. Now it is up to man to either follow the guidance and be blessed or reject it and be doomed. He has to render an account of all his actions. Keeping this in view, the reader will find that:

In this book there is no incongruity in the style, no gap in the continuity of the subject and no lack of interconnection between its various topics [. . .] The Qur’an keeps the same object in view, whether it is relating the story of the creation of the Earth or of the Heavens or of Man or is referring to the manifestations in the Universe or stating events from human history. (Maududi 13)

What Maududi asserts about Qur’anic theme and style is reinforced by Hamîd al-dîn al-Farâhî and his disciple Amîn Aḥsan Iṣlâḥî who based his commentary Tadabbur-i-Qur’ân on the idea that the Qur’an has a remarkable structure. Its suras have their own internal symmetry and organic unity. Every sura of the Qur’an has a central theme around which all its verses revolve. All the suras of the Qur’an fall into seven groups, except for Sura al-Fatiha. All groups and suras of the Qur’an propound Qur’an’s main theme which is a call to man to follow the path of Allah. (Mir, Is The Qur’ân A Shapeless Book?)

Discussing the style of Qur’anic discourse, Mustansir Mir makes a distinction between “connectedness and organic unity”:

While speaking of coherence in the structure of the Qur’ân, we must distinguish between connectedness and organic unity. A connection, howsoever weird and far-fetched, can be established between any two objects of the universe. But organic unity implies the presence of a harmonious interrelationship between the components of a body or entity which produces a unified whole, a whole which is over and above the sum total of the components of and has worth and meaning in itself. The verses and sûrahs of the Qur’ân are not simply linked up with one another, they have their place, each one of them, in the total scheme of the Qur’ân and are related not only to one another but also to that total framework. The Qur’ân is an organism, of which its verses and sûrahs are organically coherent parts. (Is The Qur’ân)

What Bannabi says about the Qur'anic style is thought-provoking. Talking about the sudden shift from one subject to another that "interrupts the normal flow of ideas", he likens it to a ladder:

By means of which one suddenly accedes to a higher plane beyond the human *self*. From this threshold, the mind, hitherto accustomed to the known and the knowable proper to the human plane, is suddenly carried to a higher plane from where it glimpses – in the flash of a Qur'anic verse – the horizon of absolute knowledge.

For example, why should a mention of optics suddenly appear in the elaboration of a metaphysical idea? Or, why should such things like geodesy and astronomy be mentioned in the exposition of a legal principle?

[. . .] Hence, one must regard such shifts and paradoxes as signals, something like *flight arrows*, which draw our attention to the Metaphysical Source from which the Qur'anic notions flashed out. They anticipate by centuries the age of human progress and coincide with facts established by science far later. (248)

Apart from disjointedness, another aspect of criticism is that the Qur'an shows great variation in style between the Macci and Madni periods. According to Theodor Nöldeke:

In point of style and artistic effect, the different parts of the Qur'an are of very unequal value.

Maududi has answered this charge of the Orientalists by showing that the style of Qur'anic revelation was in accordance with the demands of time. The revelation of the Qur'an was completed in about twenty-three years. The first part of the Prophet's mission comprised open invitation to the people of Mecca. A different form of address was required at this juncture. The earliest revelation had to capture the ear and touch the hearts of the disbelievers who excelled in poetry. Thus Mekkan suras are distinguishable by their excellent literary style, inimitable music and rhythms. At the same time, the elements of "anzar" (i.e. warning) and "tabshir" (i.e. glad tidings) are very strong in them as they deal with the Sovereignty of Allah and the Day of Judgement. In Medina, the circumstances had changed. Muslims had formed their own government. There was the external threat of invasion as well as the internal problem of the hypocrites. Laws had to be laid down for the regulation of day to day affairs. A different form of discourse was, therefore, required. As Maududi says:

The different portions of the Qur'an were revealed according to the requirements of the various phases of the Movement. It is thus obvious that a book like this cannot have the kind of uniformity of style which is followed in formal books on religion and the like. (19)

5.5. SYMBOLISM AND IMAGERY IN THE QUR'AN¹

Qur'anic imagery has always excited interest². Allen says that "[. . .] the language of the Qur'an is often used with excellent figurative effect, providing further illustration of the close linkage between metaphor and the homiletic" (60).

Bennabi, discussing the close relationship between a language and its physical environment, observes that "likewise, one can suppose, an analysis of the Qur'anic style would reveal its relationship with the Arabian space and landscape". However, an examination of metaphor, "the most characteristic rhetorical element determining a style" reveals that:

[. . .] the Qur'anic metaphor is not always, nor even often, the reflection of Bedouin life in the desert.
On the contrary, it appears to draw its elements and terms of comparison from the most diverse climates, surroundings and landscapes. (257)

Asad throws light on Qur'anic imagery in "Symbolism and Allegory in the Qur'an", one of the appendices to his translation *The Message of The Qur'an*. He bases his discussion on verse 7 of Sura Al 'Imran which states:

He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are not of well-established meaning. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is not of well-established meaning, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:" and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding. (3:7)

In the above verse, "آيَاتٌ مُّحْكَمَاتٌ" translated by Yusuf Ali as "verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning)" refer to clear injunctions about which there can be no two opinions e.g. Allah's Sole Sovereignty. In contrast are verses that have been called "مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ". These are "not of well-established meaning". These allegorical verses can be interpreted in more than one way. The Qur'an says that those who seek discord focus on allegorical verses ignoring "آيَاتٌ مُّحْكَمَاتٌ".

According to Asad, in order to understand the Qur'anic world, the allegorical and symbolic elements in it must be linked with "a realm which is beyond the reach of human perception" i.e. "al-ghayb" (989). Faith in Allah, the angels. Resurrection, Hell and Heaven are all linked with "al-ghayb". Human mind, however, "cannot operate otherwise than on the basis of previous experiences". It "cannot visualize, or form an idea of.

something that lies entirely *outside* the realm of previously realized experiences". Therefore, the idea of "a realm which is beyond the reach of human perception" i.e. "al-ghayb" could be given to man only "by means of *loan-images* derived from our actual – physical or mental – experiences" (990).

This being so, it is not enough for man to be told, "If you behave righteously in this world, you will attain to happiness in the life to come", or alternatively, "If you do wrong in this world, you will suffer for it in the hereafter". Such statements would be far too general and abstract to appeal to man's imagination and, thus, to influence his behaviour. What is needed is a more direct appeal to the intellect, resulting in a kind of "visualization" of the consequences of one's conscious acts and omissions: and such an appeal can be effectively produced by means of metaphors, allegories and parables, each of them stressing, on the one hand, the absolute *dissimilarity* of all that man will experience after resurrection from whatever he did or could experience in this world; and, on the other hand, establishing means of *comparison* between these two categories of experience. (Asad 990)

What Asad says about the use of symbolism in al-Qur'an is in accord with the approach Qutb adopted in his book Tasweer Al-Fanni Fil Qur'an, translated into Urdu as Qur'an Majeed ke Fanni Muhasin by Ghulam Ahmed Hariri. According to Qutb, Qur'anic style is chiefly imagistic.

As Qutb's book focused on Qur'anic imagery, it was of special relevance to the present research. His approach is allied to the fine arts on one side (as he refers to pictures, tone color, music, etc.) and literature on the other (as he finds elements of drama as well as story in the Qur'an).

Qutb starts with the assertion that the first people accepted Islam due to the magical impact of Al-Qur'an which held the audience spellbound. He undertakes to investigate the causes behind such impact of the Qur'an on its first audience which was that of disbelievers.

Though Qutb praises the efforts of Zamikhshari and Abdul Qahir Jurjani, he feels that these scholars could not truly highlight the beauty of Qur'anic discourse as they analyzed the verses in isolation discussing language, syntax and word order in the light of rules of rhetoric. They missed the most important characteristic of Qur'anic discourse – the one which is the essence of its magical impact on its audience.

This chief characteristic of Qur'anic style, according to Qutb, is that it is imagistic. The Qur'an unfolds its meaning through the use of images or mental pictures. Abstract meaning is presented in a concrete form that can be perceived by the senses. Simile and

metaphor are used for this purpose. Personification is also employed. Thus meaning penetrates the depth of human psyche not just mentally but also visually and sensuously.

In the Qur'an, the hidden matters in the mind and man's inner state are presented in a form that can be felt. Scenes, incidents, human forms all are presented as pictures. Then life appears in these pictures. If sound is added, they appear as live actors on the stage. The listeners are changed into the audience watching a live performance who feel that these scenes do not just represent life. Rather they are alive. This is managed through lifeless words and has a profound impact on human psyche. (54-55)

Qutb also discusses the dimensions of images or mental pictures in the Qur'an. In his opinion they are drawn using colour as well as movement. At times, instead of colour, song and music is used. At times dialogues are added. Appropriateness of words and context is taken into account. Consequently, the Qur'an has a great impact on persons of low as well as high intellect. (56-65)

Qutb goes to the extent of listing the important attributes of these word pictures: brightness of image, appropriacy, mutual balancing of parts, spreading out the parts of the picture evenly over the canvas. (168)

The Qur'an also takes into consideration an important element i.e. how long a scene should be kept before the eye of imagination. Some scenes pass so quickly that even imagination has difficulty keeping pace with them. Some are so long that they seem to stay forever. Some scenes are filled with movement while some are quite still. How long or short a scene is depends on the purpose for which it is painted. (186-187)

For example, amongst the scenes painted in detail are those of punishment on Doomsday to ensure that the senses and the imagination are thoroughly affected by them and fear and terror can penetrate human psyche. (195-196)

Qutb shows how owing to its imagistic style, the Qur'an uses images for human beings, description of past events, narration of exemplary incidents, true incidents, scenes of doomsday as well as scenes of bliss and punishment. (68-93)

5.6. LITERARY FORMS IN THE QUR'AN

In Qur'anic Studies: an Introduction, Israr Ahmed Khan, giving a somewhat similar argument as Asad and Qutb, says that "to describe a purely human phenomenon is far easier than to explain other-worldly affairs. Both need to be told through a medium man is capable of grasping" (229). To convey its major messages i.e. "man's link to Allah" and the "Day of Judgement", the Qur'an employs oath, parable, comparison, history,

warning, glad tiding, as well as rational argument. How effective this method is can be determined by “the total human transformation at the socio-cultural, spiritio-intellectual, and politico-religious levels” (229). How the earth image has been employed in “oath, parable, comparison, history, warning, glad tiding, as well as rational argument” has been discussed in subsequent chapters.

Under the heading “Literary Forms and Major Themes”, The Encyclopaedia of Islam lists Oaths and related forms, Sign-passages, Say-passages, Narratives, Regulations and Liturgical forms. It also mentions “a large number of dramatic scenes, usually involving death, the Last Judgment”, “the pleasures of paradise” and “the tortures of the hellfire” (425). As discussed in the subsequent chapters, the earth image occurs in all these forms and themes.

About the sign passages, the Encyclopaedia says:

Meccan and early Medinan parts of the Kur'an often speak of certain phenomena of nature and human life as “signs” (a'yat) of God's omnipotence and benevolence towards man, calling for gratitude and worship of Him alone. Most often mentioned are the creation of the heavens and the earth, the creation or procreation of man, the shining of the sun, moon and stars, [. . .]. The “sign-passages” treating these themes have no distinctive form, but are recognized by their content. (422)

5.7. QUR'AN: NEITHER PROSE NOR POETRY

What is the form of the Qur'anic discourse? This question has been raised since the first revelation of the book. Arabs called the Qur'an “poetry”. This is because it exhibits many characteristics of poetry. Allah Subhanahu answers that it is not poetry:

We have not instructed the (Prophet) in Poetry, nor is it meet for him: this is no less than a Message and a Qur'an making things clear: (36:69)

Amongst the criticism leveled against the Qur'an, are the views of Nöldeke:

But Muhammad's mistake consists in persistent and slavish adherence to the semi-poetic form which he had at first adopted in accordance with his own taste and that of his hearers. For instance, he employs rhyme in dealing with the most prosaic subjects, and thus produces the disagreeable effect of incongruity between style and matter.

Accordingly the sacred book has not even the artistic form of poetry; which, among the Arabs, includes a stringent meter as well as rhyme. The Qur'an is never metrical, and only a few exceptionally eloquent portions fall into a sort of spontaneous rhythm. On the other hand, the rhyme is

regularly maintained; although, especially in the later pieces, after a very slovenly fashion.

Angelika Neuwirth says in “Some Remarks on the Special Linguistic and Literary Character of the Qur’an”:

The Qur’an evades the usual terms of classification on the grounds of its claims to be a text for recitation, which is clear from the self-testimony of the oldest *suras*. It is neither to be classified as spiritual poetry nor as a prophetic oration in the sense of the ancient Hebrew genre. Above all, it is not to be understood by the term “sermon” in the precise sense of rhetoric that expresses a truth that has already been announced and attempts to urge that truth upon the listener. (253)

She advances “the unit of the sura as a heuristic basis” (254). Criticizing Nöldeke she says that “[. . .] his position of brusque rejection of the Islamic tradition makes it impossible for him to recognize the unique rules of Qur’anic discourse” (255).

Not all Orientalists are as critical of the Qur’an as Nöldeke. In his Introduction to the Qur’an, Bell says that the Qur’an does not contain the traditional rhymes of Arabic poetry. Rather, it uses “[. . .] assonance, in which short inflectional vowels at the end of a verse are disregarded, and for the rest, the vowels, particularly their length, and the fall of the accent, that is the form of the end-word of the verse, are of more importance than the consonants” (67).

In “Structure and Style of the Qur’an”, he discusses such aspects of Qur’anic discourse as rhymes, rhyme-phrases, refrains, internal rhymes, strophes, similes, metaphors, narratives and parables, etc. He also discusses the “dramatic quality” of Qur’anic scenes which he calls “a pervading characteristic of Qur’an style” (78). He concedes:

The insistence so frequently met with on its disjointedness, its formlessness, its excited, unpremeditated, rhapsodical character, rests too much on a failure to discern the natural divisions into which the *suras* fall, and also to take account of the displacements and undersigned breaks in connection, which, as we shall see, are numerous. We have to remember, too, that Muhammad disclaimed being a poet, and evidently had no ear for poetry. He claimed that he had messages to convey. We have to seek, therefore, for didactic, rather than for poetic or artistic, forms. (74)

Allen says in An Introduction to Arabic Literature:

Part of the problem in the association that the people of Mecca made between Mohammad’s recitations and those of poets and soothsayers lies in the fact that they all sought to exploit the sound-qualities of Arabic by resorting to cadential rhythms of *saj* (lit. ‘the cooing of a dove’, but

thereafter ‘rhymed and cadenced discourse’), a style and structure that makes full use of the morphological potential of Arabic. [. . .] (55)

In the shorter surahs of the Qur’an, Allen “drew attention to the shortness and parallelism of phrases, and to repetition and rhyme, most especially those connected with the style known as *saj*” (61).

In *Ulum Al-Qur’an*, Denffer states that the Qur’an is neither prose nor poetry. The prophet (pbuh) was accused of being a poet or a soothsayer because of “the usage of a particular style, employed in the Qur’an, which is said to be like *saj*’ or close to it” (74).

Saj, translated as “rhymed prose”, is distinct from poetry as “it has no consistent rhythmic pattern, and it shares with poetry the element of rhyme, though in many cases somewhat irregularly employed” (74). While distinguishing between *saj* and the Qur’anic discourse, Denffer cites Ibn Khaldun who opines that the Qur’an is neither straight prose nor rhymed prose.

Denffer quotes Sura Ikhlas as a *saj*-like passage which is irregular in its rhythm, and has a rhyme ending with the syllable “ad”. (75)

Devin J. Stewart in “*Saj in the Qur’an: Prosody and Structure*” addresses the question whether the Qur’an contains “*saj*” or not. Referring to the doctrine of “*I’jaz al-Qur’an*” i.e. the “inimitability of Qur’anic discourse”, he gives the traditional view propounded by al-Baqillani, al-Rummani and al-Suyuti, etc.:

The doctrine of inimitability holds that the Qur’an may not be compared to any type of sublunary composition, since the Qur’an represents one of God’s attributes – His speech. (214)

He gives the opposite viewpoint in the person of Diya’ al-Din ibn al-Athir who “placing formal examination of the Qur’anic text itself before doctrinal considerations, affirms that the greater part of the Qur’an is *saj*” (220). Building on ibn al-Athir’s work, Stewart finds that 85.9 % of Qur’anic verses rhyme. Only two suras out of one hundred and fourteen i.e. sura an-nasr and sura quraish show no rhyme. He inquires into the prosody of *saj* and asserts that rhyme is not the only characteristic of *saj*. “There are constraints on the relative lengths of the rhyming phrases [. . .]” (223). He concludes:

Analysis of medieval criticism on *saj*’ and formal examination of the Qur’an make possible a more complete definition of *saj*’. *Saj*’, though generally considered a sub-category of prose (*natfir*), is a type of composition distinct from free prose (*natfir mursaf*) and syllabic verse (*nazm*). (245)

5.8. MUSICAL ELEMENT OF AL-QUR'AN

The debate about the Qur'an being poetry or prose arises from the fact that the elements of rhyme and rhythm are very strong in the Qur'an. The musical element of the Qur'an has attracted the attention of Muslims and non-muslims alike. This can be judged from the words of Arberry who says that his "chief reason for offering this new version of a book which has been 'translated' many times already is that in no previous rendering has a serious attempt been made to imitate, however imperfectly, those rhetorical and rhythmical patterns which are the glory and the sublimity of the Koran" (25).

Mir says:

For those who can read the Qur'an in Arabic, the all-pervading rhythm which, in conjunction with the sustained use of what may be called rhymed prose, creates in many sūrahs a spellbinding effect that is impossible to reproduce.

Since the Qur'an is very much a text for recitation, its musical qualities have a special impact on its audience. Allen, in discussing the characteristics of the shorter Qur'anic suras such as "shortness and parallelism of phrases", "repetition and rhyme", says:

If such features are transferred from the purely textual to the acoustic realm, their impact is, needless to say, even greater: words and chant, message and sound, combine to carry the significance of the revelation to even higher levels of understanding and emotional response [. . .] the effect on the listener transcends that of words alone. (62)

In Tasweer Al-Fanni Fil Qur'an, Qutb has discussed the musical element in the Qur'an at great length. He says that the Qur'anic music is in accordance with the occasion. It exhibits qualities of both prose and poetry. It has rhythm though its verses may not rhyme. Short suras with short verses best exhibit this quality. (149-150)

Qutb shows how the Qur'anic verses have inner music. The balance is so delicate that even a little change in word order destroys the harmony. However, it is not poetry nor can it be confined within the bounds of poetry. (156)

According to Qutb, the rhymes and rhythms of suras are in accordance with the occasion and atmosphere. Even the same sura can exhibit a change in the pattern of rhyme and rhythm. This is to fulfill certain objectives e.g. in Sura Maryam two different schemes of rhyme and rhythm have been adopted for narration of incident and its analysis and conclusion. Similarly, in Sura An-naziat, there are two rhyme schemes in accordance with two different atmospheres. The beginning of the sura has verses that are short and swift. They show movement that is very fast. In the second part, the movement is slow

and the verses are long. They are appropriate for narration of incident and in fact they comprise the narration of the incident of Hazrat Moses. (163-164)

For prayers, a third kind of verbal music has been adopted that has softness, depth and pathos (164). For narration of the flood of Noah, the music of the verses is like the waves of a flood- long, short, wide, deep, high, low. This is in accordance with the terrible and terrifying atmosphere. (166- 167)

5.9. QUR'ANIC VOCABULARY

Among the ten aspects of *I'jaz-e-Qur'an* (inimitability of Qur'anic discourse) mentioned by Al-Qurtabi three pertain to language: Qur'an's language is unprecedented among the Arabs; it is purer; every word is arranged in order and in accordance with the context and used correctly. (qtd. by Doi 407)

On Qur'anic vocabulary, Mir says:

The Qur'ân uses words with precision and subtlety, and often the text yields its full meaning only after a careful re-reading of it. (The Qur'an as Literature)

Doi says that the Arabic language is rich, but the Qur'anic Arabic is richer and purer. "The Qur'an does not always use the words according to their strict dictionary meaning" (410). He gives the example of *kufra* which in different contexts means total rejection, infidelity, disbelief as well as denial.

At times the Qur'an employs the same vocabulary for the animate and the inanimate to link important themes. According to Haleem:

In fact the Qur'an uses the very same verb, *akfiraja*, for 'bringing forth' people out of their mother's womb (16:78), 'bringing forth' plants from the earth (32:27) and 'bringing forth' people from the earth at the resurrection (7:75). Likewise the same verbal root, *hayaya*, is used in 'making every *living* thing from water', '*giving life* to earth' and 'He who *gave* it *life* will *give life* to the dead'. Such a linguistic method enhances the pattern of persuasion used in the Qur'an. (39)

There has been a debate regarding foreign vocabulary in the Qur'an. Ibn 'Abbas and his school were amongst the earliest exegetes to opine that the Qur'an contains words of foreign origin. Amongst those who held the opposite view was al-Shafi'i. Bell says:

That the Qur'an contains a number of words which are not native Arabic was, a little reluctantly, recognized by Moslem scholars, though, in their lack of knowledge of other languages, they often failed to elucidate their origin. (Introduction 80)

The Encyclopaedia of Islam states that Al-Suyuti devoted separate chapters in his Itkan to “foreign loan-words” in the Qur’an. In another treatise Mutawakkili, he classified words borrowed from “Ethiopic, Persian, Greek, Indian, Syriac, Hebrew, Nabatean, Coptic, Turkish, Negro and Berber” (419).

Robert Brunschvig in “Simple Negative Remarks On The Vocabulary Of The Qur’an” adopts a new approach with regard to Qur’anic vocabulary. Instead of traditional approaches that focus on the exact meaning of words or attempt to determine foreign words in Qur’anic vocabulary, he focuses on words popular in classical Arabic that are not found in the Qur’an. In his opinion, this is because “a particularly elevated style was claimed by the Qur’an from the very beginning” (287). Brunschvig feels that “elimination from the lexicon corresponds to a conscious attitude which closely agrees with the new religion” (290). About Qur’anic vocabulary related to nature he says:

The evocation of nature is so frequent in a number of suras, so gripping and so colourful that an inventory of the arsenal of words describing the various aspects of nature appears at first to be very well stocked. There are indeed fields, such as the description of landscapes on earth, whose vocabulary is rich and varied, and where the absence of certain common terms is all the more surprising. [. . .] But is it not strange that the Qur’an does not contain the name of “sand”, *raml* (once there is “a lot of sand”, *ḥathīb* (53:14)? And that, with just one exception: *badw* (12:100; in the biblical story of Joseph), it does not give any of the common nouns for “desert” which exist: *salīra*, *qafr*, *barriyya*, *maṣmāl*, *falaḥ*, *majhāl*, *fayfa*’ [. . .] (290-291)

5.10. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, an overview of the different aspects of the research topic such as style, symbolism, literary forms, musical element and vocabulary etc is presented. As nature and earth references are scattered throughout the Qur’an and not confined to a single sura, the study of Qur’anic style calls for attention. This explains the adoption of the principle of inter-textuality (i.e. internal relationships) in the methodology. The study of Qur’anic imagery and symbolism in this chapter serves as a base for the study of nature and earth imagery that occurs in sub-subsequent chapters. References to nature and earth assume different forms like oath, parable, comparison, history, etc. Therefore it has been touched upon in 5.6. The form of Qur’anic discourse (whether it is poetry or prose) arouses debate due to its strong musical element. This element is especially evident in nature references in the Qur’an. Last but not the least, some aspects of Qur’anic vocabulary, especially those related to nature have been touched upon in this chapter.

The above review is far from complete. As stated earlier, the literature review of the work done on the Qur'an is an impossibility. The discussion in this chapter attempts to contextualize this research by giving an overview of its different aspects.

NOTES

1. 2.5. Discusses imagery from the perspective of English Literature.
2. Chapter 8 and section 9.7. discuss different kinds of images, similes, metaphors, symbol, personification as well as parables that are employed in earth imagery in al-Qur'an.

Wordsworth, William. "Tintern Abbey," The Major Works. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Wright, Andrew. Religion, Education and Post-modernity. London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004.

CHAPTER 6

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NATURE IMAGERY IN AL-QUR'AN

Before moving on to a study of earth imagery in the Qur'an, some general characteristics of nature imagery have been discussed in this chapter. These characteristics also hold for Qur'anic earth imagery. Therefore, generally verses containing the earth image have been quoted in this chapter.

6.1. ABUNDANT

The first thing to strike the reader is the abundance of nature imagery in the Qur'an. Most of this nature imagery pertains to the earth. This abundance is manifest by the fact that Al-Baqi's Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim lists 461 references in al-Qur'an to "الأرض" i.e. the earth. In some Qur'anic verses the earth is referred to more than once e.g. (2:255), (22:65), (33:27), (35:44) and (57:4). There is hardly an aspect of nature that has not been touched upon. This is because nature and all it comprises are taken as the "ayaat" or signs of Allah in Al-Qur'an.

6.2. COSMIC

The nature imagery in Al-Qur'an is of a cosmic nature. Most of it pertains to the earth and various earthly phenomena. However, there are frequent references to the heavens. Heavens are generally mentioned in juxtaposition with the earth. The following verses illustrate the cosmic nature of Qur'anic nature imagery:

Who has made the **earth** your couch, and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when ye know (the truth). (2:22)

Not for (idle) sport did We create the heavens and the **earth** and all that is between! (21:16)

6.3. UNIVERSAL

The nature imagery of Al-Qur'an exhibits universality. Universality is "that quality in a work of art which enables it to transcend the limits of the particular situation, place, time, person, and incident in such a way that it may be of interest, pleasure and profit (in the non-commercial sense) to all men at any time in any place" (Cuddon 1015).

If the above definition is applied to nature imagery in the Qur'an, it is found that universality is its inherent characteristic. What has been depicted of nature and natural phenomena is true for all times. As the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet (pbuh) in Arabia which is a desert, it would not have been surprising if its nature imagery had pertained chiefly to the desert. However, the case is far otherwise. As Bennabi says "the phototechnic notions such as tree and the horticultural varieties remind us of a soil with thick and fertile humus, rather than the arid and sandy soil of the desert" (257).

A few verses are given below to illustrate this point:

Or, who has created the heavens and the **earth**, and who sends you down rain from the sky? Yea, with it We cause to grow well-planted orchards full of beauty and delight: it is not in your power to cause the growth of the trees in them. (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Nay, they are a people who swerve from justice. (27:60)

He has created the heavens and the **earth** in just proportions, and has given you shape, and made your shapes beautiful: and to Him is the final Goal. (64:3)

The Qur'anic nature imagery addresses issues of universal interest such as life and death, virtue and vice, happiness and misery. It gives the formula of success in this world and the next. Thus not only does it address itself to universal human problems but also provides universal solutions to these problems.

Since Qur'an is a book of guidance for all mankind till the end of the world, its verses "transcend" time and place. Qutb points out how such characters are depicted in the Qur'an who are found in abundance in the world. They are true for all societies and all nations. In many cases, they are prototypes for various kinds of men; good, bad, greedy, self-sacrificing, in-grates, weak-willed, etc. In other words, man is depicted from different angles in the Qur'an (Tasweer 312-314). The following is a universal picture of such mischief makers who cause corruption and terrorism in the name of peace:

When it is said to them: "Make not mischief on the **earth**," they say: "Why, we only want to make peace!" Of a surety, they are the ones who make mischief, but they realize (it) not. (2:11-12)

6.4. MAJESTIC AND SUBLIME

Sublimity, a concept propounded by Longinus in his treatise On the Sublime connotes:

[. . .] surpassing excellence, an Everest of achievement, where great thoughts, noble feeling, lofty figures (i.e. figurative language), diction and arrangement (the five sources of sublimity established by Longinus) all coincided...The sublime also came to be associated with powerful emotions, with spiritual and religious awe, with vastness and immensity, with the natural order in its grander manifestations and with the concept of genius. (Cuddon 929)

Applying the above definition to Qur'anic nature imagery, it is seen that it manifests all the attributes of sublimity such as "great thoughts, noble feeling, lofty figures (i.e. figurative language), diction and arrangement". There can be no doubt about the loftiness of its theme. It enables man to make the right choices in life as it propounds the eternal values of love, peace, tolerance, truth, justice and righteousness. It appeals to man's reason while moving him to tears at the same time. Moreover, Qur'anic nature imagery manifests "vastness and immensity", "the natural order in its grander manifestations". It arouses "spiritual and religious awe" as well as "powerful emotions". Its profound impact on human psyche can be gauged from the words of Pickthal:

The Qur'an cannot be translated. [. . .] The Book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Qur'an, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy.

Some nature verses exhibiting sublimity are cited below:

Seest thou not that Allah has made subject to you (men) all that is on the **earth**, and the ships that sail through the sea by His Command? He withholds the sky (rain) from falling on the **earth** except by His leave: for Allah is Most Kind and Most Merciful to man. (22:65)

See they not what is before them and behind them, of the sky and the earth? If We wished, We could cause the **earth** to swallow them up, or cause a piece of the sky to fall upon them. Verily in this is a Sign for every devotee that turns to Allah (in repentance). (34:9)

The above verses are awe-inspiring. They present nature as a terrible possibility i.e. the sky falling or the earth swallowing man. Thus they can be said to manifest sublimity. Similarly, the depiction of Doomsday and Resurrection as well as the scenes from hell would fall into the same category as they are amongst the most terrible images envisaged by the human imagination.

6.5. COMPACT AND CONCISE

Depending on the context, Qur'anic nature imagery can be very concise. It employs economy of words.

And among His Signs in this: thou seest the **earth** barren and desolate; but when We send down rain to it, it is stirred to life and yields increase. Truly, He Who gives life to the (dead) **earth** can surely give life to (men) who are dead. For He has power over all things. (41:39)

Here, the entire panorama of life and death is presented before man through the analogy of the dead earth quickened by rain. The same style is adopted at many other places in the Qur'an where just in a few words a wealth of meaning is conveyed:

And the things on this **earth** which He has multiplied in varying colours (and qualities): verily in this is a sign for men who celebrate the praises of Allah (in gratitude). (16:13)

6.6. APPROPRIATE

The earth imagery is in accordance with the context. Thus, some scenes are painted in great detail while others are very brief. This is in accordance with the situation depicted. To show the brevity of the life on this earth, just three stages are mentioned that pass very swiftly (Qutb, Tasweer 187):

Set forth to them the similitude of the life of this world: It is like the rain which we send down from the skies: the earth's vegetation absorbs it. But soon it becomes dry stubble, which the winds do scatter: it is (only) Allah who prevails over all things. (18:45)

In contrast, a somewhat similar picture is painted in the following verse in great detail as the idea is to make man realize the bounty of Allah:

Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and leads it through springs in the **earth**? Then He causes to grow, therewith, produce of various colours: then it withers; thou wilt see it grow yellow; then He makes it dry up and crumble away. Truly, in this, is a Message of remembrance to men of understanding. (39:21)

Here the use of “**ثُمَّ**” (then) provides pause. The scene is kept before the eye so that the senses can absorb it and the mind can assimilate the point being made (Qutb, Tasweer 193).

Appropriateness is also manifest in the choice of words:

O ye who believe! What is the matter with you, that, when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, **ye cling heavily to the earth**? Do ye prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the Hereafter. (9:38)

In the above verse, the word “التفتتم” in the expression “التفتتم إلى الأرض” (ye cling heavily to the earth) is significant as the entire picture is drawn by means of this one word. Its heavy sound is in accordance with its meaning and creates a feeling of heaviness in the reader. (Qutb, Tasweer 133-134)

6.7. KINAESTHETIC

According to the Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, “Kinaesthesia denotes a sense of movement or muscular effort (from Gk *kineein* ‘to move’ + *aesthesis* ‘sensation’). A sense of movement and effort is inherent in the rhythm, momentum and energy of words in such an image” (Cuddon, 474).

Kinaesthesia is an important element of Qur’anic nature imagery as there is abundance of passages exhibiting strong movement e.g. movement of winds, formation of clouds, coming of rain, etc. Moreover, many verses, especially those pertaining to Doomsday, have rhythms that are strongly kinaesthetic:

When the **Earth** is shaken to its (utmost) convulsion,
And the **Earth** throws up its burdens (from within) (99:1-2)

Here a sense of strong movement is conveyed through verbs such as “shaken” and “throws up”.

One Day the earth and the mountains will be in violent commotion. And the mountains will be as a heap of sand poured out and flowing down.
(73:14)

In the verse above pertaining to Doomsday, it is difficult to conceive the “violent commotion” when the mountains (ordinarily so stable and strong) will be like sand “flowing down”. The same idea is presented very forcefully in this kinaesthetic image:

Nay! When the **earth** is pounded to powder (89:21)

Kinaesthesia is also inherent in the different natural processes highlighted in the following verse:

Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and leads it through springs in the **earth**? Then He causes to grow, therewith, produce of various colours: then it withers; thou wilt see it grow yellow; then He

makes it dry up and crumble away. Truly, in this, is a Message of remembrance to men of understanding. (39:21)

Here movement is evident from “sends down”, “leads it through”, “causes to grow”, “withers”, “see it grow yellow”, “makes it dry up and crumble away”.

6.8. SYNAESTHETIC

The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory defines synaesthesia as “(Gk ‘perceiving together’) The mixing of sensations; the concurrent appeal to more than one sense [. . .]” (Cuddon, 943). Qur’anic nature imagery exhibits synaesthesia as a number of senses are invoked simultaneously, for example:

Then, when one blast is sounded on the Trumpet, and the **earth** is moved, and its mountains, and they are crushed to powder at one stroke. (69:13-14)

A number of senses are invoked here. First is auditory, the sounding of the blast. Second is kinaesthetic as well as visual embodied in the movement of the earth and the mountains and their crushing to powder. Moreover, crushing to powder also evokes a tactile image. Last, but not the least, the whole picture is very powerful and overflowing with life. All this helps to cement the truth of the Doomsday in the mind of the listener or the reader.

6.9. SENSE OF IMMEDIACY

A sense of immediacy is present in many of nature scenes. As Qutb says, the listener feels that the scene is unfolding in front of his eyes and he himself partakes of it (Tasweer 47). Many times this is achieved by the removal of such words as “they said” e.g. the raising of Ka’aba walls by Hazrat Ibrahim and Hazrat Ismail in Sura al-Baqara (2:127-129). Similarly, in painting scenes of Doomsday, Resurrection, Heaven and Hell, such a style is adopted that the listener/reader feels that everything is taking place before his very eyes. This is achieved through invoking different senses such as those of hearing and sight:

The Trumpet will (just) be sounded, when all that are in the heavens and on **earth** will swoon, except such as it will please Allah (to exempt). Then will a second one be sounded, when, behold, they will be standing and looking on! (39:68)

One Day We shall remove the mountains, and thou wilt see the **earth** as a level stretch, and We shall gather them, all together, nor shall We leave out any one of them. (18:47)

A sense of immediacy is especially evident in the Qur'anic narratives many of which employ the earth image:

And remember Moses prayed for water for his people; We said: "Strike the rock with thy staff." Then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs. Each group knew its own place for water. So eat and drink of the sustenance provided by Allah, and **do no evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth.** (2:60)

Here the imperative “كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعَثُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ” is introduced without any such clause as “We said”. As a result, the reader or the listener feels that he is also being addressed. The past and the present merge together and the whole scene is imbued with a sense of immediacy.

6.10. QUICK SUCCESSION OF IMAGES

In many nature passages, image upon image follows in quick succession. This is especially true of verses pertaining to Doomsday. Para 30 abounds in such images. In Sura An-Naba, it is asked:

Have We not made the **earth** as a wide expanse, and the mountains as pegs? And (have We not) created you in pairs, and made your sleep for rest, and made the night as a covering, and made the day as a means of subsistence? And (have We not) built over you the seven firmaments, and placed (therein) a Light of Splendour? And do We not send down from the clouds water in abundance, that We may produce therewith corn and vegetables, and gardens of luxurious growth? Verily the Day of Sorting out is a thing appointed - (78: 6 -17)

Here, reference is made to a number of Allah's blessings one after the other. The fast rhythm of the Arabic original enhances the effect of the swift succession of scenes. The overall effect is overwhelming. The idea is to make man realize that the Power Who can do all this can also bring about Resurrection. Qutb says about these verses:

In this round we go across the vast universe, observing a great multitude of scenes and phenomena, which are sketched out with great economy of words and phrases. This helps make the rhythm sharp and penetrating, like incessant hammering. The form of question implying a statement is used here on purpose. It may be likened to a strong hand shaking those unaware, it draws their attention to all these creatures and phenomena which give strong evidence of the deliberate planning and designing which go into their creation, the ability to create and recreate, and the wisdom behind creation, which dictates that no creature will be left out of the great reckoning. Hence we come back to the fateful tiding, the subject of the argument. (Fi-Zilal 10)

6.11. ONOMATOPOEIC

Alliteration as well as repetition adds to the onomatopoeic effect of the repeated pounding of the earth in the following verse:

كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا

Nay! When the **earth** is pounded to powder (89:21)

Man is repeatedly made to ponder over the fact that this earthly life is very short. To reinforce this feeling, doomsday is talked of as if it was already here. Very powerful language is used for this purpose. The last *paras* of the Qur'an abound in such graphic images of doomsday. A very important element in this regard is the employment of onomatopoeia. With swift, forceful rhythms, the shattering impact of the doomsday is made to penetrate human psyche. Sura al-Zalzala (chapter 99) is a case in point:

1. إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا

2. وَأُخْرِجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا

3. وَقَالَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا

4. يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا

5. بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا

6. يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ

7. فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ

8. وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

When the **Earth** is shaken to its (utmost) convulsion,

And the **Earth** throws up its burdens (from within),

And man cries (distressed): 'What is the matter with it?'

On that Day will it declare its tidings:

For that thy Lord will have given it inspiration.

On that Day will men proceed in companies sorted out, to be

shown the deeds that they (had done).

Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it!

And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it.

(99:1-8)

The alliteration of “z” and “l” in the first verse is responsible for creating the onomatopoeic effect of the earthquake. The effect of rapid movement is added to by the use of powerful verbs in every verse. Some of them are especially powerful like “زُلْزِلَتْ” and “أُخْرِجَتْ”.

The personification of the earth as it “throws up its burdens” in verse 2 has a deep impact on human psyche as this “burden” is constituted of the dead bodies hidden in its entrails¹. This shattering effect is added to in the succeeding verses when the earth tells its secrets at the command of her Lord:

”بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا”

Highlighting its onomatopoeic effect, Qutb says that “the *surah* gives a violent shake to drowsy hearts; the subject matter, the scene drawn and the rhythm all contribute to the effect of a violent jolt. It is a powerful blast that makes the earth and all that is on it quake and tremble” (*Fi-Zilal* 254).

The opening verses of Sura Al Inshiqaq which deals with the day of Judgement are all end-stopped. The alliteration in “مُدَّتْ”, “تَخَلَّتْ”, “حُقَّتْ” at the end of every line along with the hard sounds of “q” and “kh” in “أَلْقَتْ”, “تَخَلَّتْ”, “حُقَّتْ” produce a sense of finality in their rhythm in consonance with their meaning:

And when the **earth** is flattened out,

وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ

And casts forth what is within it and becomes(clean) empty

وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ

And hearkens to (the Command of) its Lord- and it must needs (do so) – (then will come home the full Reality) (84:3-5)

وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ

6.12. APPEAR HYPERBOLIC YET ARE NOT

Scenes pertaining to the end of the world e.g. the boiling of seas, turning of mountains to dust, etc. that appear to be hyperbolic² are actually true as proved by modern scientific research:

When the Sky is cleft asunder; When the Stars are scattered; When the Oceans are suffered to burst forth; And when the Graves are turned upside down;- (Then) shall each soul know what it hath sent forward and (what it hath) kept back. (82:1-5)

One Day the **earth** and the mountains will be in violent commotion. And the mountains will be as a heap of sand poured out and flowing down. (73:14)

S. Bashir-ud-din Mahmud, in his book, Doomsday and Life after Death discusses the latest scientific theories pertaining to the end of the universe in the light of Qur'anic verses. He says that "many physicists believe that the 'Big Crunch' will represent the end of the physical universe. Just as they believe that the universe i.e. all space, time and matter, came into existence in a 'Big Bang' so they believe it will go out of existence in the 'Big Crunch'. This will be total annihilation. [. . .]" (53).

6.13. REVELATION OF FRESH BEAUTY IN OLD OBJECTS

In An Introduction to the Study of Literature, William Henry Hudson says that literature "reveals fresh beauty in the things with which it deals" (91). Qutb, in talking of Qur'anic imagery says that it makes man look at natural phenomena with new eyes (Tasweer 100-101). Highlighting the same point, Haleem says:

The Qur'an deals with material very intimate to human beings, things taken perhaps too much for granted for them to reflect upon. By pointing such things out, and emphasizing their phases and stages, the Qur'an refreshes people's sensitivity to them and invites reflection on them. (32)

Thus man is made to look at the sky, the earth, the sun, moon and stars from a new perspective. His attention is drawn to all natural phenomena such as the change of day and night, the coming of rain, the blowing of winds, the growth of plants, etc. as signs of the presence of the One Allah, the Creator, the Cherisher, and the Sustainer.

6.14. OVERVIEW OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH (MACRO-APPROACH)

In many places the Qur'an presents an overview of the heavens and the earth and different natural processes. The feeling is as if someone is looking at it all from above:

And it is He Who spread out the **earth**, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers: and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two: He draweth the night as a veil o'er the Day. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who consider! (13:3)

The above verses are an indication of the Qur'anic style where in a few words a wealth of meaning is conveyed. Here, there are references to the creation of the earth, of the mountains to balance it, of fruits and the fact that their creation is in pairs, as well as the alteration of day and night. All this appears to have been done in little or no time. This idea is reinforced from elsewhere in the Qur'an as the limitations of time and space are only for the creatures not for the Creator. Mention is made of the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days which naturally are not the six days of human beings:

Your Guardian-Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the **earth** in six Days, then He established Himself on the Throne (of authority): He draweth the night as a veil o'er the day, each seeking the other in rapid succession: He created the sun, the moon, and the stars, (all) governed by laws under His Command. Is it not His to create and to govern? Blessed be Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds! (7:54)

The above verse is the manifestation of a Power Who is above and beyond human comprehension as a bird's eye view of the entire universe is given here which is inconceivable for any mortal.

6.15. MICRO-APPROACH

Along with the macro approach manifest in the overview of the heavens and the earth, there is the micro approach showing hidden processes in great detail e.g. the different stages of the formation of an embryo that have been borne out by modern scientific research:

O mankind! if ye have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then (foster you) that ye may reach your age of full strength; and

some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (much). And (further), thou seest the **earth** barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs). (22:5)

In the above verse man is being reminded of the different stages he passes through before his birth. Moreover, reference is also made to the dead earth that becomes green after rain falls on it. Thus the God Who can do all this can also bring the dead to life again.

In The Developing Humans, Keith L. Moore discusses, while referring to Qur'anic verses, various stages of the development of an embryo that have come to light only after the invention of microscope. He concludes:

There are other statements in the Qur'an and the sayings in the Hadith about embryology that are meaningless to me, but very likely they will make sense later when new knowledge is developed. The agreement I have found between statements in the Qur'an and sayings in the Hadith may help to close the gap between science and religion which has existed for so many years.

6.16. ORGANIC UNITY

Nature passages, wherever they occur, show organic unity³. This means that they form a complete picture. There is no need to add or remove anything from them:

Do they not look at the Camels, how they are made? - And at the Sky, how it is raised high?-And at the Mountains, how they are fixed firm? - And at the **Earth**, how it is spread out? (88:17-20)

In the above verses heavens and the earth, mountains and camels have been united to form one picture. Though apparently disparate, all of them are huge and overpowering (Qutb, Tasweer 179). The eye is invited to look at the camel, then it is made to look higher at the sky. Now the downward movement starts. There are the high mountains standing firm and the eye comes back to the earth whose expanse appears to be unlimited. The idea here is to arouse awe which is in keeping with its theme since the Sura deals with the Day of Judgement.

Verily the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah (alone). It is He Who sends down rain, and He Who knows what is in the wombs. Nor does any one know what it is that he will earn on the morrow: Nor does any one know in what **land** he is to die. Verily with Allah is full knowledge and He is acquainted (with all things). (31:34)

According to Qutb (Tasweer 181), the canvas here is very wide and encompasses the present and the future, time and place, rain, mother's womb as well as the Doomsday. What provides organic unity here is the knowledge of the Unknown which rests with Allah alone.

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the **earth**; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the Ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an **earth** that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the **earth** - (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise. (2:164)

Ali gives a detailed analysis of the above verse showing the organic unity of all the elements of nature mentioned in it:

[. . .] Allah is One: and among His wondrous Signs is the unity of design in the widest diversity of Nature. The Signs are taken from the features of beauty, power, and utility to man himself, and lead up to an appeal to Man's own intelligence and wisdom [. . .] (65)

6.17. UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Nature images are unified yet diverse. What unifies them is the common theme i.e. all have been created by Allah and put at man's disposal. At the same time they are diverse as they cover all that is in the heavens and the earth. Similarly, different references to the same object or element can exhibit great diversity e.g. references to earth, sky, water, fire, etc.

The earth imagery also exhibits unity as well as diversity. There is unity as the central image is the earth. There is diversity as diverse images are clustered around this central image e.g. trees, plants, fruits, seeds, animals, insects, etc.

6.18. DIVERSE CONTEXTS

Diversity of contexts is another attribute of Qur'anic nature imagery. For example, earth imagery appears in diverse contexts such as the Sole Sovereignty of Allah, Allah's attributes, Man in his various states and acts, Resurrection, jihad, migration, travel, Friday prayers, etc. It also appears as an allusion, symbol, and personification. It occurs in various similes and metaphors. It is also important in the stories of prophets. In most cases even when the earth image is not explicitly mentioned, it is implicitly present as when different earthly phenomenon are referred to.

Most of these aspects have been discussed in the subsequent chapters.

6.19. AESTHETIC ELEMENT

The aesthetic aspect of the nature imagery in the Qur'an is significant. The Holy Qur'an says:

He has created the heavens and the **earth** in just proportions, and has given you shape, and made your shapes beautiful: and to Him is the final Goal. (64:3)

Amongst all the known planets, the earth is the only one endowed with life. Rivers, springs, mountains, plants, trees, flowers, fruits, birds, animals, human beings all add to the beauty of this colourful planet. The earth imagery of the Qur'an touches upon all these aspects of the earth. Moreover, there is explicit mention of colours with reference to the earth. Some of the verses are as follows:

Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and leads it through springs in the **earth**? Then He causes to grow, therewith, produce of various **colours**: then it withers; thou wilt see it grow **yellow**; then He makes it dry up and crumble away. Truly, in this, is a Message of remembrance to men of understanding. (39:21)

And the things on this **earth** which He has multiplied in varying **colours** (and qualities): verily in this is a sign for men who celebrate the praises of Allah (in gratitude). (16:13)

Ali exclaims about the above verse "whose heart has not been moved by the glorious gradation of colours in the sunset clouds? The gradations are infinite, and it is only the eye of an artist that can express their collective beauty [. . .]" (640).

The aesthetic aspect of the Qur'an is so significant that some of the scenes from hell are terrifyingly beautiful. In the following verses flames are depicted going as high as castles that are like yellow camels:

Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth! (It will be said:) "Depart ye to that which ye used to reject as false! Depart ye to a Shadow (of smoke ascending) in three columns," (which yields) no shade of coolness, and is of no use against the fierce Blaze. "Indeed it throws about sparks (huge) as Forts, as if there were (a string of) yellow camels (marching swiftly)." Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth! (77:28-34)

Nasir A. Naseer, in Jamaliyat Qur'an-e-Hakim ki Roshni Main, has given a detailed discussion on Qur'anic concept of aesthetics and beauty. Through analysis of Qur'anic verses, he propounds that organic unity, perfect harmony, balance and proportion are the

aesthetic values propounded by the Qur'an. An inherent characteristic of beauty is that it is blissful. While beauty is external - dependent on the senses, bliss is inward – dependent on the heart. What is beautiful to the senses is bliss to the heart. Naseer shows how the beauty of the heavens and the earth springs from their organic unity, balance and proportion as they all have been created by the One Creator.

Beauty of thought as well as style, diction and composition is manifest from the Qur'anic verses. Rhythmic beauty is also its important element. Unfortunately most of this beauty is lost in translation.

6.20. COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

Comparison and contrast are amongst the standard devices used in the Qur'an. It, in fact, is an inherent characteristic of Qur'anic style. Thus, there is a contrast between believers and disbelievers, day and night, light and darkness, vice and virtue, heaven and hell. The Qur'an shows the believers being rewarded and the wrong-doers being punished. The Prophet (pbuh) himself has been called “bashir” and “nazir” due to this reason i.e. one who gives glad tidings as well as warning. Comparison and contrast is also evident in nature imagery in the Qur'an:

6.20.1. Living and Dead Earth

Two contrasting states of the earth are focused upon in nature imagery⁴. These are “living” and “dead”. There are numerous verses in the Qur'an pertaining to these two aspects of the earth:

And Allah sends down rain from the skies, and gives therewith **life** to the **earth** after its **death**: verily in this is a Sign for those who listen. (16:65)

A Sign for them is the **earth** that is dead: We do give it life, and produce grain therefrom, of which ye do eat. And We produce therein orchards with date-palms and vines, and We cause springs to gush forth therein: That they may enjoy the fruits of this (artistry): It was not their hands that made this: will they not then give thanks? Glory to Allah, Who created in pairs all things that the **earth** produces, as well as their own (human) kind and (other) things of which they have no knowledge. (36: 33-36)

In the above verse, the transition of the earth from the dead to the living is shown in detail. The dead earth is revived and produces gardens of fruits, water gushes forth in the form of springs adding to the sense of life. Qutb (Tasweer 141) cites the following verses to show the contrasting images of life and death:

Does it not teach them a lesson, how many generations We destroyed before them, in whose dwellings they (now) go to and fro? Verily in that are Signs: Do they not then listen? (32:26)

And do they not see that We do drive rain to **parched soil** (bare of herbage), and produce therewith crops, providing food for their cattle and themselves? Have they not the vision? (32:27)

Here, the first verse refers to people and the second to earth. The contrast is between the two states of life and death. In (32:26), reference is made to people once living in dwellings who are now dead. These dwellings are now frequented by live people walking to and fro. In (32:27), the dead earth “الأَرْضِ الْجَرُزِ” produces herbage because of the life giving water.

6.20.2. Positive and Negative Aspects of Nature

Both the positive and negative aspects of nature are shown in the Qur'an. This is especially true of passages related to heaven (embodying bliss) and hell (showing torment) that are based on comparison and contrast. Similarly, contrasting states of previous generations are shown as to how they were given power in the land but were destroyed due to their ingratitude:

See they not how many of those before them We did destroy? - generations We had established on the **earth**, in strength such as We have not given to you - for whom We poured out rain from the skies in abundance, and gave (fertile) streams flowing beneath their (feet): yet for their sins We destroyed them, and raised in their wake fresh generations (to succeed them). (6:6)

Water is the basis of life:

"He Who has, made for you the **earth** like a carpet spread out; has enabled you to go about therein by roads (and channels); and has sent down water from the sky." With it have We produced diverse pairs of plants each separate from the others. (20:53)

The same water, in spite of its life giving properties, can destroy if Allah so wills:

Then the word went forth: "O **earth**! swallow up thy water, and O sky! Withhold (thy rain)!" and the water abated, and the matter was ended. The Ark rested on Mount Judi, and the word went forth: "Away with those who do wrong!" (11:44)

6.20.3. Present Bliss Contrasted with Lack of Bliss

Man takes all the bliss and comforts of his earthly life for granted, forgetting that they can be snatched away from him. Growth of plants, fruits, flowers and crops, water and fire are

taken by man as everyday occurrences. Man thinks of the earth and all it contains as his birthright, forgetting to be grateful to Him Who has bestowed all these. Many verses in the Qur'an present the possibility of a reversal of the present state of bliss, enjoining upon man to give thanks for the blessings of Allah:

See ye the seed that ye sow in the ground? Is it ye that cause it to grow, or are We the Cause? Were it Our Will, We could crumble it to dry powder, and ye would be left in wonderment, (Saying), "We are indeed left with debts (for nothing): "Indeed are we shut out (of the fruits of our labour)" See ye the water which ye drink? Do ye bring it down (in rain) from the cloud or do We? Were it Our Will, We could make it salt (and unpalatable): then why do ye not give thanks? See ye the Fire which ye kindle? Is it ye who grow the tree which feeds the fire, or do We grow it? We have made it a memorial (of Our handiwork), and an article of comfort and convenience for the denizens of deserts. Then celebrate with praises the name of thy Lord, the Supreme! (56:63-74)

6.20.4. Reward and Punishment in Afterlife in Terms of Earthly Images

Heaven and hell are the epitome of reward and punishment. The bliss of heaven and the torments of hell both are presented in terms of earthly images with which human beings are familiar in their earthly life⁵. The heaven is generally referred to as "jannat" or "jannaat" i.e. gardens underneath which rivers flow (2:25). There would be excellent company and the choicest of food and drinks:

But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before," **for they are given things in similitude**; and they have therein companions pure (and holy); and they abide therein (forever). (2:25)

Asad translates the phrase "هَذَا الَّذِي رَزَقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَمْثَرُ بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا" ("Why, this is what we were fed with before," for they are given things in similitude) as "It is this that in days of yore was granted to us as our sustenance!" – for they shall be given something that will recall that [past]." He comments:

Lit., "something resembling it". Various interpretations, some of them of an esoteric and highly speculative nature, have been given to this passage...man's actions and attitudes in this world will be mirrored in their "fruits", or consequences, in the life to come – as has been expressed elsewhere in the Qur'an in the verses, "and he who shall have done an atom's weight of good, shall behold it; and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil, shall behold it" (99:7-8)...(7)

The Qur'an gives detailed imagery about the blessings of paradise. They embody the height of delight that man can imagine. In contrast are the torments of hell:

Say, "The truth is from your Lord": Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it): for the wrong-doers We have prepared a Fire whose (smoke and flames), like the walls and roof of a tent, will hem them in: if they implore relief they will be granted water like melted brass that will scald their faces, how dreadful the drink! How uncomfortable a couch to recline on! (18:29)

One feature of Qur'anic discourse is that the heaven and hell are not mentioned in isolation. Where one is mentioned, the other is generally referred to as well. The next verses of the above sura refer to the delights of Paradise:

As to those who believe and work righteousness, verily We shall not suffer to perish the reward of any who do a (single) righteous deed. For them will be Gardens of Eternity; beneath them rivers will flow: they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade; They will recline therein on raised thrones. How good the recompense! How beautiful a couch to recline on! (18:30-31)

6.20.5. The Earth - Spacious and Narrow

In some verses, two contrasting states of the earth are shown. It can become spacious or narrow in accordance with Allah's command. The imagery of the earth being spacious or narrow generally occurs with reference to jihad and migration:

When angels take the souls of those who die in sin against their souls, they say: "In what (plight) were ye?" They reply: "Weak and oppressed were we in the **earth**." They say: "Was not the **earth** of Allah spacious enough for you to move yourselves away (from evil)?" Such men will find their abode in Hell - What an evil refuge! - (4:97)

The earth is Allah's. It can become spacious or narrow in accordance with His will:

Assuredly Allah did help you in many battle-fields and on the day of Hunayn: Behold! your great numbers elated you, but they availed you naught: **the land, for all that it is wide, did constrain you**, and ye turned back in retreat. (9:25)

"الأرض" translated as "land" here is seen in two contrasting states: wide (رَحْبَتْ) and narrow (ضَنْقَتْ).

The psychological state is focused upon in the following verse as the earth becomes spacious or "constrained" at Allah's command:

(He turned in mercy also) to the three who were left behind; (they felt guilty) to such a degree that **the earth seemed constrained to them, for all its spaciousness**, and their (very) souls seemed straitened to them - and they perceived that there is no fleeing from Allah (and no refuge) but to Himself. Then He turned to them, that they might repent: for Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. (9:118)

In one verse, Allah tells His bondsmen:

O My servants who believe! Truly, **spacious is My Earth**: therefore serve ye Me - (and Me alone)! (29:56)

From the above verse it becomes clear that the earth would always prove to be spacious for true believers. This is borne out by the following verse:

Say: "O ye my servants who believe! Fear your Lord. Good is (the reward) for those who do good in this world. **Spacious is Allah's earth!** Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure!" (39:10)

6.21. CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses some attributes of nature imagery in the Qur'an. The list is by no means exhaustive. All these attributes are also applicable to earth imagery in the Qur'an. Generally verses containing the earth image have been quoted to illustrate this point. Some aspects of comparison and contrast deal specifically with the earth such as "living and dead" and "spacious and narrow".

NOTES

1. 8.3.4. Discusses this aspect of sura al-zalzala in greater detail.
2. A hyperbole is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as "exaggerated statement that is made for special effect and is not meant to be taken literally."
3. See 5.4. for Mir's comments on organic unity in al-Qur'an.
4. 8.3.1 discusses this aspect in greater detail.
5. 5.5. discusses the aspect of symbolism and imagery in al-Qur'an.

CHAPTER 7

FUNCTIONS OF NATURE IMAGERY

7.1. APPEARANCE WITHIN A FUNCTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Nature passages, though they beautify discourse, are not there just for that purpose. Rather they always appear within a functional framework in the Qur'an. A striking example is Sura ar-Rahman. Here, beautiful nature imagery is set forth in a most musical form. However, the purpose of the whole is to remind man of Allah's bounty as well as his own ingratitude:

It is He Who has spread out the **earth** for (His) creatures: therein is fruit and date-palms, producing spathes (enclosing dates); also corn, with (its) leaves and stalk for fodder, and sweet-smelling plants. Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? (55:10-13)

In the view of the researcher, some of the functions fulfilled by nature imagery in Al-Quran are as follows:

1. Persuasion
2. Concrete presentation of abstract concepts
3. Manifestation of Allah's attributes such as His Sole Sovereignty, Mercy, Benevolence, Love, Forgiveness, Wrath, etc.
4. Proof of resurrection
5. Manifestation of obedience for man
6. Incentive for man to be grateful
7. Aesthetic appeal
8. Depiction of balance and proportion in nature
9. Invitation to ponder and think
10. Illustration of scientific truths
11. Temptation for man
12. A test for man's powers

13. Scourge for wilful nations
14. Punishment in after life (imagery of hell)
15. Ultimate reward for believers (imagery of heaven)

Most of the above functions have been discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters. Here they are briefly touched upon:

7.1.1. Persuasion

Many arguments are made persuasive in the Quran through nature imagery. The creation of the heavens and the earth is presented as proof of Allah's Sovereignty:

O ye people! Adore your Guardian-Lord, Who created you and those who came before you, that ye may become righteous, Who has made the **earth** your couch and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when ye know (the truth). (2:21-22)

"Is not He Who created the heavens and the **earth** able to create the like thereof?"- Yea, indeed! for He is the Creator Supreme, of skill and knowledge (infinite)! (36:81)

For the sake of persuasion, searching questions are asked, one of them being what the false gods "have created in the (wide) earth":

Say: "Have ye seen (these) 'Partners' of yours whom ye call upon besides Allah? Show me what it is they have created in the (wide) **earth**. Or have they a share in the heavens? Or have We given them a Book from which they (can derive) clear (evidence)? - Nay, the wrong-doers promise each other nothing but delusions. (35:40)

Say: "Who is it that sustains you (in life) from the sky and from the **earth**? or who is it that has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living? and who is it that rules and regulates all affairs?" They will soon say, "Allah". Say, "will ye not then show piety (to Him)?" (10:31)

Similar arguments are presented in (40:57), (13:16), (16:72-73), (46:4), (46:33) and (88:17-21).

For the sake of persuasion, Quran adopts two techniques which are (1) "anzar" i.e. giving warning and (2) "tabshir" i.e. giving glad tidings. Nature imagery pertaining to hell and heaven belongs to these two categories respectively.

7.1.2. Concrete Presentation of Abstract Concepts

An important function of Quranic nature imagery is the concrete presentation of abstract concepts. Al-Qur'an is a book for the guidance of man. As such it appeals not just to man's reason but also his emotions and senses. The appeal to emotions is made by concretely presented imagery. Domsday, Resurrection, Judgement, Hell and Heaven are not just mentioned. Rather, they are presented concretely in graphic detail evoking senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, etc. Their emotional appeal strengthens their appeal to reason. As discussed in 5.5., in Tasweer Al-Fanni Fil Quran, Qutb asserts that the Qur'an adopts an imagistic style to present the most abstract of concepts. For example, Allah's power and dominion is shown concretely through the image of a "throne":

[. . .] His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the **earth**, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory). (2:255)

Similarly, the psychological state of being constrained is presented concretely by the metaphor of the narrowing of the earth:

(He turned in mercy also) to the three who were left behind; (they felt guilty) to such a degree that the **earth** seemed constrained to them, for all its spaciousness, and their (very) souls seemed straitened to them - and they perceived that there is no fleeing from Allah (and no refuge) but to Himself. Then He turned to them, that they might repent: for Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. (9:118)

Word, an abstract entity, is given physical form through a simile:

And the parable of an evil Word is that of an evil tree: It is torn up by the root from the surface of the **earth**: it has no stability. (14:26)

7.1.3. Manifestation of Allah's Attributes such as His Sole Sovereignty,

Mercy, Benevolence, Love, Forgiveness, Wrath, etc.

Nature imagery functions in the Qur'an as the greatest proof as well as manifestation of Allah's attributes such as His Sole Sovereignty, Mercy, Benevolence, Love, Forgiveness, Wrath, etc. A very large number of verses in the Qur'an pertain to this subject. For example, the following verses allude to the heavens and the earth as a manifestation of His Sole Sovereignty:

He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the **earth**: no son has He begotten, nor has He a partner in His dominion: it is He Who created all things, and ordered them in due proportions. (25:2)

Allah is He Who created seven Firmaments and of the **earth** a similar number. Through the midst of them (all) descends His Command: that ye may know that Allah has power over all things, and that Allah comprehends, all things in (His) Knowledge. (65:12)

Discussing nature passages in the Qur'an, Bell says:

There are in the Qur'an a great many passages in which natural phenomena are referred to, and ascribed to Allah as the creator. The creation of the heavens and the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the alternation of night and day, the production of men and animals, the growth of seed, the production of food, the sending of rain, the revival of dead (parched) land, the sailing of ships upon the sea – these and other things are often referred to in the Qur'an as "signs". Some of them are occasionally used as proofs or confirmations of the doctrine of resurrection. But on the whole the impression a reader gets from the use made of these signs is that they are indications of Allah's power and bounty. (Muhammad's Religious Activity 260)

7.1.4. Proof of Resurrection

One function of nature imagery in the Qur'an is that it is presented as a proof of Resurrection which is a central concept in Muslim faith:

Allah is He Who raised the heavens without any pillars that ye can see; is firmly established on the throne (of authority); He has subjected the sun and the moon (to his Law)! Each one runs (its course) for a term appointed. He doth regulate all affairs, explaining the signs in detail, that ye may believe with certainty in the meeting with your Lord. (13:2)

The revival of the dead earth when rain falls on it has been likened to the Resurrection of man:

It is Allah Who sends forth the Winds, so that they raise up the Clouds, and We drive them to a land that is dead, and revive the earth therewith after its death: even so (will be) the Resurrection! (35:9)

Then contemplate (O man!) the memorials of Allah's Mercy! - how He gives life to the **earth** after its death: verily the same will give life to the men who are dead: for He has power over all things. (30:50)

7.1.5. Manifestation of Obedience for Man

Allah has created an ordered universe. There is order in the universe as every created thing obeys Allah:

To Him belongs every being that is in the heavens and on earth: all are devoutly obedient to Him. (30:26)

Whatever beings there are in the heavens and the earth do prostrate themselves to Allah (acknowledging subjection) - with good-will or in spite of themselves: so do their shadows in the mornings and evenings (13:15).

Nature, by presenting a model of obedience, functions as an incentive for man to be obedient to his Lord. Man is the only one endowed with the choice to accept Allah's submission or turn away. Wahiduddin Khan says in Islam: Deen-e- Fitrat that "The universe owes its unfailing precision to the fact that it works in complete consonance with God's plans. Human beings can likewise achieve moral exactitude in their affairs by becoming ethically attuned to the divine scheme of things [. . .]" (23).

Chapter "Earth and Man" discusses this aspect in greater detail.

7.1.6. Incentive for man to be grateful

Nature imagery is presented in the Qur'an as an incentive to man to be grateful to Allah. Earth has been spread out for him, made a fit abode for him to live on. Man's life is dependent on the provision made for him on earth:

It is He Who has made the sea subject, that ye may eat thereof flesh that is fresh and tender, and that ye may extract therefrom ornaments to wear; and thou seest the ships therein that plough the waves, that ye may seek (thus) of the bounty of Allah and that ye may be grateful. (16:14)

Say: Is it that ye deny Him Who created the **earth** in two Days? And do ye join equals with Him? He is the Lord of (all) the Worlds. He set on the (earth), mountains standing firm, high above it, and bestowed blessings on the **earth**, and measured therein all things to give them nourishment in due proportion, in four Days, in accordance with (the needs of) those who seek (sustenance). (41:9-10)

Every sort of blessing has been provided for man:

And cattle He has created for you (men): from them ye derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) ye eat. (16:5)

7. 1.7. Aesthetic Appeal

Nature imagery beautifies discourse. It functions as an appeal to man's aesthetic sense to pay attention to the message of the Qur'an. The Holy Quran says:

He has created the heavens and the **earth** in just proportions, and has given you shape, and made your shapes beautiful: and to Him is the final Goal. (64:3)

In fact, the beautiful colours of the earth are presented as a sign of the Creator:

And the things on this **earth** which He has multiplied in varying **colours** (and qualities): verily in this is a sign for men who celebrate the praises of Allah (in gratitude). (16:13)

Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and forthwith **the earth becomes clothed with green?** for Allah is He Who understands the finest mysteries, and is well-acquainted (with them). (22:63)

Seyyed Hossein Nasr says:

The beauty of nature is the direct reflection of the beauty of God; it is therefore an interiorizing beauty which, although seemingly outward, does not disperse but brings man back to the Center wherein abides the ineffable beauty of the One. (122)

7.1.8. Balance and Proportion in Nature

There is balance and proportion in nature:

And the **earth** We have spread out (like a carpet); set thereon mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance. (15:19)

Nasr says:

The spiritual significance of nature manifests itself on many levels and through many channels. Virgin nature possesses order and harmony. There exists within this vast domain of nonhuman origin an order, an interrelation of parts, a complementarity of functions and roles and an interdependence which, for the mind not paralyzed by the reductionism inherent in the modern scientific worldview, cannot but lead to a sense of wonder and awareness of the spiritual character of that Light which turned chaos into cosmos and which still reveals itself in the natural order. (120)

If there had been the slightest deviation in the natural order and balance, the result would have been total devastation and destruction of the universe. Man is also commanded to be just and maintain the balance:

And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of Justice), in order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. (55:7-9)

7.1.9. Invitation to Ponder and Think

Nature imagery is presented in the Qur'an to invite man to reflect. Nature, including the heavens and the earth and all that is in between are the "ayaat" i.e. signs of Allah. They are an invitation to the people to ponder and think. However, only those who have the seeing heart can benefit from these signs of Allah:

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the **earth**, and the alternation of night and day - there are indeed Signs for men of understanding (3:190)

7.1.10. Illustration of Scientific Truths

Nature imagery also illustrates scientific truths. However, many of these truths have come to light only recently. For example:

Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the **earth** were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe? (21:30)

Mountains are the pegs of this earth:

And He has set up on the **earth** mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you; and rivers and roads; that ye may guide yourselves; (16:15)

According to Israr Ahmed:

The gigantic creation, the universe, with all its uniformities of causal processes, is a prime "sign" (ayat) or proof of its Maker. In addition to cosmogony, many of these Qur'anic references relate to physics, astronomy, geology, embryology and psychology, etc. The full meaning of these references could not be understood by early exegetical writers because scientific knowledge was extremely limited at that time. [. . .]

7.1.11. Temptation for Man

Nature also functions as a temptation for man. The earth and the blessings and treasures it contains are coveted by man to the extent that he forgets his Creator:

Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: Women and sons; Heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (To return to). (3:14)

Man starts thinking that he is the owner of all he has. He is reminded:

It is We Who will inherit the earth, and all beings thereon: to Us will they all be returned. (19:40)

The believers are asked:

And what cause have ye why ye should not spend in the cause of Allah? -
For to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth [. . .] (57:10)

7.1.12. A Test for Man's Powers

All in the heavens and the earth have been subjected to man:

Do ye not see that Allah has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made his bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen? Yet there are among men those who dispute about Allah, without knowledge and without guidance, and without a Book to enlighten them! (31:20)

It is because everything has been made subservient to man that he has been able to channelize the elements of nature to serve him:

Seest thou not that Allah has made subject to you (men) all that is on the **earth**, and the ships that sail through the sea by His Command? He withholds the sky (rain) from falling on the earth except by His leave: for Allah is Most Kind and Most Merciful to man. (22:65)

Iqbal says:

When attracted by the forces around him, man has the power to shape and direct them; when thwarted by them, he has the capacity to build a much vaster world in the depths of his own inner being, wherein he discovers sources of infinite joy and inspiration. Hard his lot and frail his being, like a rose-leaf, yet no form of reality is so powerful, so inspiring, and so beautiful as the spirit of man! (10)

Thus, though everything on earth has been subjected to man, the power he enjoys is by the command of Allah as "He withholds the sky (rain) from falling on the earth except by His leave". Man tends to forget this fact in his arrogance. He is reminded:

Say: "See ye? - If your stream be some morning lost (in the underground earth), who then can supply you with clear-flowing water?" (67:30)

7.1.13. Scourge for Wilful Nations

Allah has blessed man with every conceivable thing. He has honoured man:

We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation. (17:70)

However, when man, in his arrogance, flouts the Commands of Allah, the same nature turns against him at the behest of its Creator:

(Remember also) Qarun, Pharaoh, and Haman: there came to them Moses with Clear Signs, but they behaved with insolence on the **earth**; yet they could not overreach (Us). Each one of them We seized for his crime: of them, against some We sent a violent tornado (with showers of stones); some were caught by a (mighty) Blast; some We caused the **earth** to swallow up; and some We drowned (in the waters): It was not Allah Who injured (or oppressed) them: They injured (and oppressed) their own souls. (29:39-40)

7.1.14. Ultimate Reward for Believers (Imagery of Heaven)

Nature imagery functions in the Qur'an to make man imagine absolute bliss in the form of gardens and flowing rivers:

Allah hath promised to Believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity. (9:72)

Verily the Companions of the Garden shall that Day have joy in all that they do; They and their associates will be in groves of (cool) shade, reclining on Thrones (of dignity); (Every) fruit (enjoyment) will be there for them; they shall have whatever they call for; "Peace!" - a Word (of salutation) from a Lord Most Merciful! (36:55-58)

7.1.15. Punishment in Hell (Imagery of Hell)

One function of nature imagery in Al-Qur'an to paint the tortures of hell-fire in store for the sinners. Such scenes are painted in graphic detail. The idea is to make man realize that the ultimate success lies in following the path of righteousness:

And on the Day that the Unbelievers will be placed before the Fire, (they will be asked,) "Is this not the Truth?" they will say, "Yea, by our Lord!" (One will say:) "Then taste ye the Penalty, for that ye were wont to deny (Truth)!" (46:34)

Even their food and drink would be a source of torture to them:

Verily the tree of Zaqqum will be the food of the Sinful - Like molten brass; it will boil in their insides, like the boiling of scalding water. (A voice will cry:) "Seize ye him and drag him into the midst of the Blazing Fire! Then pour over his head the Penalty of Boiling Water. Taste thou (this)! Truly wast thou mighty, full of honour! Truly this is what ye used to doubt!" (44:43-50)

According to Frithjof Schuon:

[...] the most terrible descriptions of Hell may remain ineffective for the most hardened criminals, but when they are effective they too are a part of mercy, since they prevent some souls from being lost. (20)

7.2. CONCLUSION

The above analysis highlights some of the functions fulfilled by nature imagery in the Qur'an. A detailed discussion on many of these aspects is presented in the subsequent chapters that focus specifically on earth imagery in the Qur'an.

CHAPTER 8

THE EARTH IMAGERY

The Qur'an is very rich in earth imagery. Imagery has already been discussed at length in Chapter 2. This chapter takes a closer look at earth imagery in al-Qur'an. The word "الأرض", the main focus of this research, is generally translated as "earth". It chiefly constitutes a visual image. However, it also occurs as other images such as kinaesthetic, gustatory, etc.

The earth image is also employed in different figures of speech such as simile, metaphor, personification and symbol.

8.1. The Earth - A Recurrent Image

The earth is alluded to repeatedly in the Qur'an. As discussed in 1.4, it is a recurrent image that comes with reference to Allah's Sovereignty and attributes, man's creation, guidance, life and death, etc. So much so that even heaven and hell are described in terms of earthly images. There are frequent references to the earth and all it contains from the beginning till the end of the Qur'an. The abundance of references to the earth can be ascertained from the fact that in Sura Baqara alone it is referred to 23 times, in Sura Ale Imran 13 times and in Sura an-Nisa 12 times. Out of 114 suras of the Holy Qur'an, earth is alluded to in 80. As mentioned earlier, there are more than 461 references to the earth in the Qur'an.

Amongst the different kinds of earth images that occur in the Qur'an are:

8.1.1. Visual

The earth chiefly constitutes a visual image. Every time the word "الأرض" occurs in the Qur'an, a visual image is evoked. As there are 461 references to the earth in the Qur'an, all of them would constitute visual images. For example:

Do they not look at the **earth** - how many noble things of all kinds We have produced therein? (26:7)

Do then those who devise evil (plots) feel secure that Allah will not cause the **earth** to swallow them up, or that the Wrath will not seize them from directions they little perceive? (16:45)

Glory to the Lord of the heavens and the **earth**, the Lord of the Throne (of Authority)! (He is free) from the things they attribute (to him)! (43:82)

Amongst the visual images are images of:

a. Light and Darkness

Such earth images are not frequent in the Qur'an. These would include:

And the **Earth** will **shine** with the Glory of its Lord: the Record (of Deeds) will be placed (open); the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forward and a just decision pronounced between them; and they will not be wronged (in the least). (39:69)

With Him are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the **darkness** (or depths) **of the earth**, nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered), but is (inscribed) in a record clear (to those who can read). (6:59)

b. Colours

There is explicit reference to "colours" besides individual colours that are mentioned with the earth:

And the things on this **earth** which He has multiplied in varying **colours** (and qualities): verily in this is a sign for men who celebrate the praises of Allah (in gratitude). (16:13)

Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and forthwith the **earth** becomes clothed with **green**? for Allah is He Who understands the finest mysteries, and is well-acquainted (with them). (22:63)

8.1.2. Kinaesthetic

Kinaesthesia has already been discussed in 6.7. with reference to the attributes of nature imagery. The Qur'an abounds in kinesthetic earth images. Most of them occur with reference to Doomsday:

And the **earth** is **moved**, and its mountains, and they are **crushed** to powder at one stroke – (69:14)

One Day the **earth** and the mountains will be in **violent commotion**. And the mountains will be as a heap of sand poured out and flowing down. (73:14)

How great a sin polytheism is, can be gauged from this verse:

At it the skies are ready to burst, the **earth to split asunder**, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin. (19:90)

Nay! When the **earth** is **pounded** to powder, (89:21)

And We **split** the **earth** in fragments, (80:26)

Kinaesthetic earth images also occur in narratives:

Then Allah sent a raven, who **scratched** the **ground**, to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. "Woe is me!" said he; "Was I not even able to be as this raven, and to hide the shame of my brother?" then he became full of regrets- (5:31)

Nor walk on the earth with insolence: for thou canst not **rend the earth asunder**, nor reach the mountains in height. (17:37)

8.1.3. Tactile

Many kinaesthetic earth images are also tactile i.e. they also evoke the sense of touch. For example:

And the **earth** is **moved**, and its mountains, and they are crushed to **powder** at one stroke – (69:14)

Nay! When the **earth** is pounded to **powder**, (89:21)

8.1.4. Olfactory

Olfactory images pertain to the sense of smell. An olfactory earth image occurs in the following verse:

It is He Who has spread out the **earth** for (His) creatures: Therein is fruit and date-palms, producing spathes (enclosing dates); Also corn, with (its) leaves and stalk for fodder, and **sweet-smelling** plants. (55:10-12)

8.1.5. Auditory

An auditory earth image occurs with reference to Resurrection:

And the Day that the **Trumpet** will be **sounded** - then will be smitten with terror those who are in the heavens, and those who are on **earth**, except such as Allah will please (to exempt): and all shall come to His (Presence) as beings conscious of their lowliness. (27:87)

8.1.6. Gustatory

Gustatory images pertain to taste. There are many gustatory images in the Qur'an that refer to the earth:

And remember ye said: "O Moses! we cannot endure one kind of food (always); so beseech thy Lord for us to produce for us of **what the earth groweth, its pot-herbs, and cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions.**" [. . .] (2:61)

O ye people! **Eat** of what is on **earth**, lawful and good; and do not follow the footsteps of the Evil One, for he is to you an avowed enemy. (2:168)

And in the **earth** are tracts (diverse though) neighbouring, and gardens of vines and fields sown with **corn**, and palm trees - growing out of single roots or otherwise: watered with the same water, yet some of them We make more excellent than others **to eat**. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who understand! (13:4)

Or, Who originates Creation, then repeats it, and who gives you **sustenance** from heaven and **earth**? (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Say, "Bring forth your argument, if ye are telling the truth!" (27:64)

A gustatory earth image occurs in the following Qur'anic narrative:

To the Thamud people (We sent) Salih, one of their own brethren: He said: "O my people! Worship Allah: ye have no other god but Him. Now hath come unto you a clear (Sign) from your Lord! This she-camel of Allah is a Sign unto you: So leave her **to graze** in Allah's **earth**, and let her come to no harm, or ye shall be seized with a grievous punishment. (7:73)

8.2. EARTH AS SYMBOL

A symbol is something that extends meaning beyond its physical presence. According to A Handbook to Literature "...a *symbol* is an IMAGE that evokes an objective, concrete reality and has that reality suggest another level of meaning" (Holman and Harmon, 494).

The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory defines a symbol in the following way:

The word symbol derives from the Greek verb *symbollein* 'to throw together', and its noun *symbolon* 'mark', 'emblem', 'token', or 'sign'. It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or 'stands for' something else...A symbol differs from an allegorical sign in that it has a *real* existence, whereas an allegorical sign is arbitrary. (Cudden, 939)

Though the earth is a concrete physical object yet in the Qur'an, it gives evidence of a Higher Reality beyond itself i.e. that of its Creator. Thus the earth emerges as a symbol in the Qur'an as do other objects of nature. They are called "signs" or the "ayaat" of Allah. Allah who is beyond sensory perception manifests His Greatness through all created objects. They bear His stamp like all works of art reflect their artists. According to Martin Lings:

[...] for a thing's glorification of God – which *ye understand not* – is precisely its symbolism. [...] Thus the universe and its contents were created in order to make known the Creator, and to make known the good is to praise it; the means of making it known is to reflect it or shadow it; and a symbol is the reflection or shadow of a higher reality. (1)

The Qur'an contains repeated references to the earth as well as different earthly phenomenon as the "ayaat" of Allah. According to The Encyclopaedic Index of the Qur'an:

The word *Ayah*, plural *Ayaat* means (1) Verses of the Qur'an (2) Verses of any other divine Scripture (3) Revelations of Allah (4) Sign / Signs of Allah.

The word *Ayat* has come 186 times, and *Ayaat* 295 times.
(Osama, 677)

Thus every verse of the Qur'an is, in fact, a sign of Allah.

And it is He who spread out the **earth**, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers: and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two: He draweth the night as a veil o'er the Day. Behold, verily in these things there are **signs** for those who consider! (13:3)

And among His **Signs** is the creation of the heavens and the **earth**, and the living creatures that He has scattered through them: and He has power to gather them together when He wills. (42:29)

8.3. EARTH PERSONIFIED

Personification means giving human attributes to something inanimate. In Writing about Literature, Cohen defines personification as:

[. . .] giving human characteristics or shape to an inanimate object, to an emotion or instinct, to a moral quality or spiritual concept, to an event like death, or to an invisible essence like the soul. The coupling of inanimate or abstract forces or concepts with human behaviour evokes images that generally would not be expected. (52)

The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory defines personification as “the impersonation or embodiment of some quality or abstraction; the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects” (Cuddon, 702).

The earth has been personified in the Qur'an. There are frequent references to the dead earth being brought to life. At the same time, the earth is presented as reviving, swelling, adorning itself, obeying Allah with pleasure, carrying out His commands, telling her tidings, etc.

8.3.1. Living and Dead

As discussed in 6.20.1. the Qur'an repeatedly refers to the earth that is dead and is brought to life by Allah. This constitutes “a Sign for those who listen” (16:65).

A Sign for them is the **earth** that is dead: We do give it **life**, and produce grain therefrom, of which ye do eat. And We produce therein orchards with date-palms and vines, and We cause springs to gush forth therein: That they may enjoy the fruits of this (artistry): It was not their hands that made this: will they not then give thanks? Glory to Allah, Who created in pairs all things that the **earth** produces, as well as their own (human) kind and (other) things of which they have no knowledge. (36: 33-36)

According to Ali that “lest anyone should say, ‘if they are destroyed, how can they be brought before the Judgement Seat’ a symbol is pointed to. The earth is to all intents and purposes dead in the winter, but Allah revives it in the spring” (1123).

And Allah sends down rain from the skies, and gives therewith **life** to the **earth** after its **death**: verily in this is a Sign for those who listen. (16:65)

And if indeed thou ask them who it is that sends down rain from the sky, and gives **life** therewith to the **earth** after its **death**, they will certainly reply, "Allah!" Say, "Praise be to Allah!" But most of them understand not. (29:63)

It is He Who brings out the living from the dead, and brings out the dead from the living, and Who gives **life** to the **earth** after it is **dead**: and thus shall ye be brought out (from the dead). (30:19)

Ali comments on the above verse:

From dead matter Allah's creative act produces life and living matter, and even science has not yet been able to explain the mystery of life. Life and living matter again seem to reach maturity and again die, as we see every day. No material thing seems to have perpetual life. But again we see the creative process of Allah constantly at work, and the cycle of life and death seems to go on. (1012)

The personified earth appears as living and dead in these verses as well:

Then contemplate (O man!) the memorials of Allah's Mercy! - how He gives life to the **earth** after its death: verily the same will give life to the men who are dead: for He has power over all things. (30:50)

Know ye (all) that Allah giveth life to the **earth** after its death! Already have We shown the Signs plainly to you, that ye may learn wisdom. (57:17)

8.3.2. Swelling and Giving Birth

The earth is barren but swells with life and “puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs)” when Allah pours rain on it:

O mankind! [. . .] thou seest the **earth barren** and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is **stirred (to life)**, it **swells**, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs). (22:5)

And among His Signs in this: thou seest the **earth barren and desolate**; but when We send down rain to it, it is **stirred to life and yields increase**. Truly, He Who gives life to the (dead) earth can surely give life to (men) who are dead. For He has power over all things. (41:39)

As discussed in 5.9. Haleem observes that “...the Qur'an uses the very same Arabic verb for ‘bringing forth’ people from their mothers’ wombs (16:78), ‘bringing forth’ plants from the earth (6:99) and ‘bringing forth’ people from the earth at the resurrection (30:19)” (87). This heightens the personification of the earth as it lives, gives birth and dies. Similarly, in the verse above, the verb “حَاشَتْ” used with reference to the earth is also used with reference to people e.g. in (88:2) which says that “some faces, that Day, will be humiliated”.

8.3.3. Adorning Itself

The Qur'an talks about the earth adorning itself in the following verse:

The likeness of the life of the present is as the rain which We send down from the skies: by its mingling arises the produce of the earth- which provides food for men and animals: (It grows) till **the earth is clad with its golden ornaments and is decked out (in beauty)**: the people to whom it belongs think they have all powers of disposal over it: There reaches it Our command by night or by day, and We make it like a harvest clean-mown, as if it had not flourished only the day before! Thus do We explain the Signs in detail for those who reflect. (10:24)

Pickthall translates “اَلَاخَذَتِ الْاَرْضُ زُخْرُفَهَا وَارْتَبَتْ” as “when the earth **bath taken on her ornaments and is embellished**”. Here, the earth is seen as taking on her ornaments, adorning and embellishing itself like a woman. This is a beautiful metaphor for the growth of flowers, fruits and vegetation of all sorts. Then, those who thought they were the earth's owners instead of Allah find that nothing is left: “We make it like a harvest clean-mown, as if it had not flourished only the day before!”.

8.3.4. Telling Her Tidings

The earth would talk when commanded by its Lord on the Day of Judgement¹:

When the **Earth** is shaken to its (utmost) convulsion,
And the **Earth** throws up its burdens (from within),
And man cries (distressed): ‘What is the matter with it?’ -
On that Day will it declare its tidings:
For that thy Lord will have given it inspiration.
On that Day will men proceed in companies sorted out, to be shown the deeds that they (had done).
Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it!
And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it. (99:1-8)

In the verses of Surat al-Zalzala cited above, the earth has been personified. This personification of the earth is sustained throughout this short sura. The earth is “shaken” and “throws up its burdens”, it will “declare its tidings: For that thy Lord will have given it inspiration”. The word “اَوْحَى” used with reference to the earth here in (99:5) “ordinarily means inspiration, the Message put into the mind or heart by Allah.” (Ali, 654). Thus the earth is presented as a living creature and the message is put into its “mind or heart by Allah”. Ali says:

The present order may be personified as the earth. It will pass away but the Deeds done therein, even the most secret, will be brought to the full light of day. And this will be because Allah will give the Command, the inspiration or Word, by which alone all events do proceed. The “inspiration” is the Command or direction conveyed by instruction breathed into the Earth personified: it is directed to tell the whole story of what it knows. (1681)

It would be interesting to look at the comments of a scientist in this regard. Mahmud says:

As far as the record keeping function of inanimate things, this might have been incomprehensible to the man of the past, but it shall be no more a puzzle for the modern man. We know that each second trillions of neutrinos and cosmos radiations are showered from the outer space towards the earth [. . .] Therefore, idea of records of human deeds by the atoms of our own bodies should not be a surprising idea any more. (177)

8.3.5. Refuses to undertake the trust (الأمانة)

In the following verse, the personified earth is seen as refusing to undertake the “Trust” deeming it too difficult and heavy but this same burden is accepted by man:

We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the **Earth** and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it- He was indeed unjust and foolish - (33:72)

What is this “أمانة” that the earth refused to accept? According to Asad:

The classical commentators give all kinds of laborious explanations to the term *amanah* (“trust”) occurring in this parable, but the most convincing of them (mentioned in Lane I, 102, with reference to the above verse) are ‘reason’, or ‘intellect’, and ‘the faculty of volition’ – i.e., the ability to choose between two or more possible courses of action or modes of behaviour, and thus between good and evil. (33)

Thus the earth as well as every created thing besides man simply obeys Allah without having “the ability to choose between two or more possible courses of action or modes of behaviour, and thus between good and evil”.

8.3.6. Obedient to Allah, Carrying out His Orders

The earth as well as every other object of nature is obedient to Allah:

Moreover, He comprehended in His design the sky, and it had been (as) smoke: He said to it and to the **earth**: “Come ye together, willingly or

unwillingly." They said: "We do come (together), in willing obedience."
(41:11)

To explain the above verse, Asad quotes Zamakhshari as follows:

The meaning of God's command to the skies and the earth to 'come' and their submission [to His command] is this: He willed their coming into being, and so they came to be as He willed them to be...: and this is the kind of metaphor (majaz) which is called 'allegory' (tamthil)...Thus, the purport [of this passage] is but an illustration (taswir) of the effect of His almighty power on all that is willed [by Him], and nothing else [. . .] (732)

The earth obeyed Allah at the time of its creation as seen in the above verse. It would also obey Allah on the day of Judgement, emptying itself (84:3-5)² as well as telling its tidings (99:4-5).

And when the **earth** is flattened out, And casts forth what is within it and becomes (clean) empty, And hearkens to (the Command of) its Lord - and it must needs (do so) – (then will come home the full Reality). (84:3-5)

The earth, personified in this sura, is seen losing its round shape in obedience to Allah's command and emptying itself. According to Qutb, "these short verses with their vivid description show both the sky and the earth as living, receiving their orders and instantly complying with them. Their obedience is a manifestation of their conscious and dutiful submission" (104).

Ali's comments on the above verses are as follows:

The earth is a globe, enclosing within it many secrets and mysteries – gold and diamonds in its mines, heat and magnetic forces in its entrails, and the bodies of countless generations of men buried within its soil. At its dissolution all these contents will be disgorged: it will lose its shape as a globe, and cease to exist. (1622)

He further says that "we think the earth so solid and real. All our perishable things dissolve into the earth. But the earth itself will dissolve into a truer Reality" (1622).

Today science is discovering that the earth might already be losing its round shape as foretold in this verse:

See they not that We gradually reduce the **land** (in their control) from its outlying borders? (Where) Allah commands, there is none to put back His Command; and He is swift in calling to account. (13:41)

8.3.7. Singing Allah's praises

The seven heavens and the **earth**, and all beings therein, declare His glory: there is not a thing but celebrates His praise; And yet ye understand not how they declare His glory! Verily He is Oft-Forbearing, Most Forgiving! (17:44)

In the above verse, the personified earth is shown as singing the praises of its Lord. Man, endowed with will and intellect, is the only one to turn his back to his Lord. At the same time, the knowledge he has is so little that he fails to comprehend how “the seven heavens and the **earth**, and all beings therein, declare His glory”.

8.3.8. Shedding tears

The Holy Qur'an talks about the shedding of tears with relation to the earth. About the drowning of Pharoah and his party, it is said:

And neither heaven nor **earth** shed a tear over them: nor were they given a respite (again). (44:29)

The earth as well as the sky did not deem them worthy to be wept over. “They died, ‘unwept, unhonoured, and unsung’. They were too inordinate to be given another chance. Pharoah had claimed to be their supreme god; and they had followed him!” (Ali 1287).

8.3.9. Swallows at Allah's command

Everything created by Allah obeys Him. The earth also does as directed. It can let loose the vast reserves of water it contains at Allah's will as well as “swallow” them. After Noah's flood, the earth is directed “يَا أَرْضُ امْلِكِي مَائِكَ”:

Then the word went forth: "O **earth**! swallow up thy water, and O sky! Withhold (thy rain)!" and the water abated, and the matter was ended. The Ark rested on Mount Judi, and the word went forth: "Away with those who do wrong!" (11:44)

The unbelievers are warned:

See they not what is before them and behind them, of the sky and the **earth**? If We wished, We could cause the **earth** to swallow them up, or cause a piece of the sky to fall upon them. Verily in this is a Sign for every devotee that turns to Allah (in repentance). (34:9)

About Qarun, it is said in the Holy Qur'an:

Qarun was doubtless, of the people of Moses; but he acted insolently towards them: such were the treasures We had bestowed on him that their very keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men (28:76)

He is told not to make mischief on earth (28:77) but he persisted in his arrogance. As a result, the earth was caused to "swallow him up":

Then **We caused the earth to swallow him up and his house**; and he had not (the least little) party to help him against Allah, nor could he defend himself. (28:81)³

Some other verses containing this expression are (16:45), (29:40), (34:9), and (67:16).

8.4. SIMILES

Similes form an important part of Qur'anic style. Some of them use the earth image as follows:

- a. "Say: Shall we cry, instead of unto Allah, unto that which neither profiteth us nor hurteth us, and shall we turn back after Allah hath guided us, **like one bewildered whom the devils have infatuated in the earth**, who hath companions who invite him to the guidance (saying): Come unto us? Say: Lo! the guidance of Allah is Guidance, and we are ordered to surrender to the Lord of the Worlds" (6:71)⁴

Here the state of a man who has lost the way is picturesquely shown. Asad translates the expression "كَالَّذِي اسْتَهْوَتْهُ الشَّيَاطِينُ فِي الْأَرْضِ حَيْرَانٌ" of the above verse as "like one whom the satans have enticed into blundering after earthly lusts". He gives its literal interpretation as "whom the satans have enticed with lusts on earth, [rendering him] bewildered..." (182). According to Qutb (*Tasweer* 63), the Qur'an adopts an imagistic style to present even abstract concepts and emotional states (as discussed in 5.5.). Here, the internal bewilderment of a man torn between worshipping the One True God or many non-existent ones is shown.

The only true religion is Allah's. It is "deen-e-fitrah" as everything has been designed by Allah to obey Him. Man, the only one endowed with the will to choose makes a God of his vain desires. The result is that he loses the straight path and strays through the earth bewildered and lost. Another simile incorporating the earth image and closely linked in theme with the above is as follows:

- b. Relate to them the story of the man to whom We sent Our signs, but he passed them by: so Satan followed him up, and he went astray. If it had been Our will, We should have elevated him with Our signs; **but he inclined to the earth, and followed his own vain desires**. His similitude is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, or if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls out his tongue. That is the similitude of those who reject Our signs; So relate the story; perchance they may reflect (7:175-176).

The above verse draws the portrait of a man who follows his own vain desires. Instead of aspiring to the elevation promised, he inclined towards the earth (اُخْلَدَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ). Figuratively, this implies his fall towards the earthly (baser) elements in his own nature. Daryabadi says that “the comparison is in point of utter contemptibility and restiveness” (168). According to Asad, he is likened to a dog:

Because his attitudes are influenced only by what his earth-bound desires represent to him as his immediate “advantages” or “disadvantages”, the type of man alluded to in this passage is always – whatever the outward circumstances – a prey to a conflict between his reason and his base urges and, thus, to inner disquiet and imaginary fears, and cannot attain to that peace of mind which a believer achieves through his faith (230).

The following is another striking simile that employs the earth image:

- c. Seest thou not how Allah sets forth a parable? - A goodly word like a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens – it brings forth its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So Allah sets forth parables for men, in order that they may receive admonition. And the parable of an evil Word is that of any evil tree: It is torn up by the root from the surface of the **earth**: it has no stability. Allah will establish in strength those who believe, with the word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter; but Allah will leave, to stray, those who do wrong: Allah doeth what He willeth. (14: 24-27)

Ali gives a detailed analysis of the above simile:

The goodly tree is known for : (1) its beauty: it gives pleasure to all who see it (2) its stability; it remains firm and unshaken in storms, because its roots are firmly fixed in the earth; (3) its wide compass; its branches reach high, and it catches all the sunshine from heaven, and gives shade to countless birds in its branches and men and animals beneath it, and (4) its abundant fruit, which it yields at all times. So is the Good Word. It is as beautiful as it is true. It abides in all changes and chances of this life , and even beyond [. . .] The evil tree is the opposite of the goodly tree. The parallelism of contrast can be followed out in all the details of the last note. (610)

Asad focuses on the word “كَلِمَةً” in the above simile:

In its wider meaning, the term *kalima* (‘word’) denotes any conceptual statement or proposition. Thus, a ‘good word’ circumscribes any proposition (or idea) that is intrinsically true and – because it implies a call to what is good in the moral sense – is ultimately beneficent and enduring; and since a call to moral righteousness is the innermost purport of everyone of God’s messages, the term ‘good word’ applies to them as well. Similarly, the ‘corrupt word’ mentioned in verse 26 applies to the opposite of what a divine message aims at: namely, to every idea that is intrinsically false or morally evil and, therefore, spiritually harmful. (376)

8.5. METAPHORS

Metaphors are frequently used in the Qur’an. Metaphor, according to Bennabi, “is the most characteristic rhetorical element determining a style that shall be examined in order to constitute the geographic coordinates of a language. [. . .] however, the Qur’anic metaphor is not always, nor even often, the reflection of Bedouin life in the desert.” (257)

Many metaphors in the Qur’an employ the earth image. A significant aspect of these metaphors is that many of them encapsulate meaning which is gradually being unraveled with the increase in man’s knowledge. Some metaphors employing the earth image are discussed below:

a. An awe-inspiring metaphor employing the earth image occurs with reference to Allah’s light:

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the **earth**. The parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass; the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things (24:34).

The above verse employs a beautiful metaphor with reference to Allah’s light. In fact, Allah himself is “the Light of the heavens and the **earth**”. All light is from Him as is all guidance. He guides “whom He will to His Light”. In fact the prayer of the believers in Afterlife would be “Our Lord! Perfect our Light for us, and grant us Forgiveness: for Thou hast power over all things” (66:8).

The profundity of the Light verse could be realized from the fact that volumes have been written to discuss it, the chief-most being “Mishkat al Anwar” by Ghazali (Ali, 876).

Asad comments:

The particle *ka* (“as if” or “as it were”) prefixed to a noun is called *kaf at-tashbih* (“the letter *kaf* pointing to a resemblance [of one thing to another] or “indicating a metaphor). In the above context it alludes to the *impossibility* of defining God even by means of a metaphor or a parable for, since “there is nothing like unto Him” (42:11), there is also “nothing that could be compared with Him” (112:4). Hence, the parable of “the light of God” is not meant to express His reality – which is inconceivable to any created being and, therefore, inexpressible in any human language – but only to allude to the illumination which He, who is the Ultimate Truth, bestows upon the mind and the feelings of all who are willing to be guided. Tabari, Baghawi and Ibn Kathir quote Ibn ‘Abbas and Ibn Mas’ud as saying in this context: “It is the parable of His light *in the heart* of a believer.” (541)

Bennabi, while calling the above verse “one of the most beautiful metaphors of the Qur’an” goes on to add that “it is one of the most remarkable coincidences of the Qur’anic notions with scientific facts”. “Borrowing some adequate equivalents of its symbolic terms from modern technology”, he makes the following substitutions “suggested by the very terms of the verse” (254):

Niche = Projector = Reflector
 Flame = Incandescent Luminous Object = Filament
 Glass = Bulb

Bennabi, thus, interprets this verse as follows:

“Even without the contact of fire, the light flashes out of a projector, in which there is a filament in a bulb, which is lit up by the essence of a blessed tree, which is neither from the east nor from the west.” We should notice here one of the most astounding coincidences of revealed notions with subsequent scientific facts. (255)

Iqbal, in expounding the Light verse says:

No doubt, the opening sentence of the verse gives the impression of an escape from an individualistic conception of God. But when we follow the metaphor of light in the rest of the verse, it gives just the opposite impression. The development of metaphor is meant rather to exclude the suggestion of a formless cosmic element by centralizing the light in a flame which is further individualized by its encasement in a glass likened

unto a well-defined star. [. . .] in the world of change, light is the nearest approach to the Absolute. The metaphor of light as applied to God, therefore, must, in view of modern knowledge, be taken to suggest the Absoluteness of God and not His Omnipresence which easily lends itself to a pantheistic interpretation. (51).

b. In the following verses, the earth has been called “كَفَاتًا” i.e. “a receptacle” for the living and the dead:

Have We not made the **earth** (as a place) to draw together
The living and the dead,
And made therein mountains standing firm, lofty (in stature); and provided
for you water sweet (and wholesome)? (77:25-27)

Asad translates verse 25 “أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا” as “Have We not caused the earth to hold within itself”. Daryabadi as well as Khan and Hilali translate “كَفَاتًا” as a “receptacle”. What inspires awe is that the earth is a receptacle for “the living and the dead”.

This metaphor for the earth is most profound. What is striking is the economy as well as appropriacy of expression. Just in a few words, the entire panorama of life, death and resurrection has been encompassed. As the earth is “كَفَاتًا” for “the living and the dead”, it draws everything to its bosom. It provides for the living, by means of sweet water (مَاءً فَرَاتًا) and all blessings that ensue from it. At the same time, it is a receptacle to receive all dying objects. The significance of this fact is struck home in “the story of the two sons of Adam” (5:27) when Qabeel (Cain) killed Habeel (Abel). After the murder, he did not know what to do with the corpse of his brother. The Holy Qur’an says:

Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the **ground**, to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. (5:31)

“الْأَرْضُ” translated as “ground” here becomes a receptacle for “سَوْءَةٌ أَخِيَّةٌ”. “سَوْءَةٌ” may mean ‘corpse’, with a suggestion of nakedness and shame [. . .] (Ali, 256).

Thus, the earth while providing for the subsistence of all life on it also takes care of the dead. This is Allah’s mercy for mankind. If Allah had not made the earth “كَفَاتًا” for the dead, man could never manage the dead bodies of plants, animals and men by himself. This planet, then, would not have been habitable for man. In this verse, explicit mention is made of mountains and sweet water. Mountains play a pivotal role in the water cycle which is the very basis of life. A fine ecological balance is maintained between all the processes of life and death (such as decomposition and recycling) on earth.

c. How man's life, death and resurrection are tied up with the earth is summed up in the following verse:

And Allah has produced you from the **earth**, growing (gradually), And in the End He will return you into the (earth), and raise you forth (again at the Resurrection)? (71:17-18)

The above verse uses a metaphor to highlight the special relationship between the earth and man. It employs the words “نَبَاتًا” and “أَنْبَتَ” which are used with reference to the growth of plants. The metaphor here is of the growth of human beings from the earth similar to the growth of plants, trees and vegetation. They will return to the earth after their death and be raised again at resurrection.

There are many flowering plants which die at the end of a season and come out again when that season returns. This is a part of natural cycle and no one considers it unusual. By using this metaphor, the fact of resurrection is being highlighted. The metaphor is very apt because for Allah raising human beings from the earth, then returning them back to it, then raising them again is as simple as the growth of plants and trees. According to Ali, “the simile is that of a seed sown, that germinates, grows, and dies, and goes back to the earth. In man, there is the further process of Resurrection” (1535).

Asad's analysis brings out the deeper meaning of the metaphor “أَنْبَتَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ نَبَاتًا” in the above verse. He says:

This phrase has a two-fold meaning. In the first instance, it alludes to the evolution of the individual human body out of the same substances- both organic and inorganic – as are found in and on the earth as well; and in this it enlarges upon the creation of the human individual “in successive stages” referred to in verse 14 above. Secondly, it alludes to the evolution of the human *species*, which, starting from the most primitive organisms living on earth, has gradually ascended to ever higher stages of development until it has finally reached that complexity of body, mind and soul evident in the human being. (897)

d. The following metaphor captures the psychological state of the disbeliever when he encounters the day of Judgement. The utter helplessness and futility of the disbeliever is shown using the earth image:

On that day those who reject Faith and disobey the Messenger will wish that the **earth** were made one with them: But never will they hide a single fact from Allah! (4:42)

Pickthal translates “تَسَوَّى بِهِمُ الْأَرْضُ” in the above verse as “they were level with the ground”. According to Ali:

Those who reject Allah’s message will wish, when their eyes are opened, that they were reduced to dust, for existence itself will be agony to them. They might like to hide in the dust, but nothing is hidden from Allah. All their past will stand out clear before Him. (198)

A somewhat similar idea is given in the following verse although it does not employ the word “الْأَرْضُ”:

Verily, We have warned you of a Penalty near- the Day when man will see (the deeds) which his hands have sent forth, and the Unbeliever will say, "Woe unto me! Would that I were (mere) dust!" (78:40)

8.6. CONCLUSION

The earth imagery in the Qur’an is very rich. This chapter attempts to show the diversity of earth imagery in the Qur’an. As seen in the above analysis, the earth chiefly occurs as a personification in the Qur’an – living, dead, adorning itself, singing Allah’s praises, obeying her Lord, telling her tidings, swallowing, shedding tears, etc.

Not only is the earth a symbol, like other natural phenomena, it also occurs in various images, similes and metaphors. The subsequent chapters look at some other dimensions of the earth imagery in the Qur’an.

NOTES

1. 6.11. discusses the onomatopoeic element of this sura.
2. 6.11. discusses the onomatopoeic element of this sura.
3. 4.4. looks at some problems of translation w.r.t. this verse.
4. 4.4. discusses some other translations of this simile.

CHAPTER 9

THE EARTH IMAGE – FORMS AND STYLE

9.1. INTRODUCTION

As discussed in 5.5., The Encyclopaedia of Islam lists Oaths and related forms, Sign-passages, Say-passages, Narratives, Regulations and Liturgical forms under the heading “Literary Forms and Major Themes”. Khan states in Qur’anic Studies: an Introduction, that the Qur’an employs oath, parable, comparison, history, warning, glad tiding, as well as rational argument to convey its major messages.

The earth image occurs in all these forms. Some of these aspects have already been discussed, such as comparison and contrast in 6.20. Discussion on others, for example, the occurrence of the earth image in narratives, regulations and liturgical forms would come in the next chapters.

The following analysis shows the occurrence of the earth image in some of these forms. Some other features related to form and style have also been discussed.

9.2. OATHS

Oaths form an important part of Qur’anic style. On the authority of Al- Zarkashi, Khan defines an oath as “a phrase whereby an information is confirmed and emphasized” (230). According to him, Allah swears in the Qur’an by “His own existence” as well as by that of His acts and creation.

Some oaths employing the earth image are:

- a. Then, by the Lord of heaven and **earth**, this is the very Truth, as much as the fact that ye can speak intelligently to each other. (51:23)

- b. By the **Earth** and its (wide) expanse: (9:6)
- c. By the Firmament which returns (in its round), and by the **Earth** which opens out (for the gushing of springs or the sprouting of vegetation) - Behold this is the Word that distinguishes (Good from Evil): (86:11-13)

9.3. SIGN PASSAGES

The earth image is frequently used in sign passages. Most of these sign passages pertain to Allah's Sovereignty, Bounty, Resurrection, Judgement, etc. Such passages have been discussed in detail in other chapters. Here, a few examples would suffice:

Know ye (all) that Allah giveth life to the **earth** after its death! Already have We shown the Signs plainly to you, that ye may learn wisdom. (57:17)

A Sign for them is the **earth** that is dead: We do give it life, and produce grain therefrom, of which ye do eat. (36: 33)

9.4. EMPLOYMENT OF DIALOGUE

Many verses in the Quran are in dialogue form. This is because al-Quran is a message from God to man. It also teaches man how to address his Lord e.g. Sura al-Fatiha and numerous other prayers. Consequently, it is in interactive mode and requires the listener's or reader's active participation. Many verses are addressed to believers "يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا", disbelievers "يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ" and mankind in general "يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ". The Prophet (pbuh) is often addressed. At times he is commanded to say something. Consequently "قُلْ" is a word that occurs quite frequently. Haleem says that "the word 'say' is used in the Qur'an well over 300 times" (3). The importance of the listener's or reader's active interaction with Allah's book can be realized by the injunction in the Quran to be quiet and listen attentively when the Quran is being recited:

When the Qur'an is read, listen to it with attention, and hold your peace: that ye may receive Mercy (7:204).

Dialogues are used many times in the Quran i.e. interactive mode is used to drive home its lessons. The earth image is frequently employed:

He it is Who created the heavens and the **earth** in six Days - and His Throne was over the waters - that He might try you, which of you is best in conduct. But if thou wert to say to them, "Ye shall indeed be raised up

after death", the Unbelievers would be sure to say, "This is nothing but obvious sorcery!" (11:7)

9.4.1. Narratives

Dialogue is also frequently used in "qasas" i.e. narratives of the prophets. This adds to their dramatic element:

Their apostles said: "Is there a doubt about Allah, The Creator of the heavens and the **earth**?" It is He Who invites you, in order that He may forgive you your sins and give you respite for a term appointed!" They said: "Ah! ye are no more than human, like ourselves! Ye wish to turn us away from the (gods) our fathers used to worship: then bring us some clear authority." (14:10)

The following verses of Sura al-An'aam refer to the earth twice:

It is He who created the heavens and the **earth** in true (proportions): the day He saith, "Be", behold! it is. His Word is the Truth. His will be the dominion the day the trumpet will be blown. He knoweth the unseen as well as that which is open. For He is the Wise, well acquainted (with all things). Lo! Abraham said to his father Azar: "Takest thou idols for gods? For I see thee and thy people in manifest error". So also did We show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the **earth**, that he might (with understanding) have certitude. (6:73-75)

Here the assertion about the Sovereignty of Allah in verse 73 culminates in Abraham being shown "the kingdom of the heavens and the earth" in verse 75 resulting in "certitude".

The incident of Moses is narrated in the Quran many times. Dialogue is frequently employed. In the following verses Prophet Moses alludes to the earth to answer Pharaoh's query about Allah:

Pharaoh said: "And what is the 'Lord and Cherisher of the worlds'?" (Moses) said: "The Lord and Cherisher of the heavens and the **earth**, and all between- if ye want to be quite sure." (26:23-24)

Most Qur'anic Narratives use the earth image. It occurs in Al-Baqara, Al-Isra, Ash-shuara An-Naml, Al-Ankaboot, Saba, As-Saaffat, Al-Ghafir. It is used extensively in Al-A'raaf, Yusuf and Al-Qasas. In Sura Hud, it is narrated:

To the Thamud People (We sent) Salih, one of their own brethren. He said: "O my people! Worship Allah: ye have no other god but Him. **It is He Who hath produced you from the earth** and settled you therein: then

ask forgiveness of Him, and turn to Him (in repentance): for my Lord is (always) near, ready to answer." (11:61)

The people, however, refused to believe and demanded a miracle. Their prophet told them:

"And O my people! This she-camel of Allah is a symbol to you: leave her to feed on **Allah's (free) earth**, and inflict no harm on her, or a swift penalty will seize you!" (11:64)

9.4.2. Say-passages

Say-passages generally are in question form:

Say: "Who is the Lord and Sustainer of the heavens and the **earth**?" Say: "(It is) Allah." Say: "Do ye then take (for worship) protectors other than Him, such as have no power either for good or for harm to themselves?" Say: "Are the blind equal with those who see? Or the depths of darkness equal with light?" Or do they assign to Allah partners who have created (anything) as He has created, so that the creation seemed to them similar? Say: "Allah is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the Supreme and Irresistible." (13:16)

Quran focuses on the doubts that rise in the hearts of the disbelievers in order to answer them. That is why they are asked questions such as "Are the blind equal with those who see? Or the depths of darkness equal with light?" Or do they assign to Allah partners who have created (anything) as He has created, so that the creation seemed to them similar? (13:16)

At times both the question and the answer is provided:

Say: "Who is it that sustains you (in life) from the sky and from the **earth**? or who is it that has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living? and who is it that rules and regulates all affairs?" They will soon say, "Allah". Say, "will ye not then show piety (to Him)?" (10:31)

Say: "To whom belong the **earth** and all beings therein? (Say) if ye know!" They will say, "To Allah!". Say: "Yet will ye not receive admonition?" (23:84-85)

9.4.3. Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical questions form a part of Quranic style. They make an appeal to man's reason so that he ponders and thinks. This enables man to realize the Truth which is the Sole

Sovereignty of Allah and Resurrection on the day of Judgement. In order to do so, attention is drawn to the earth, which is man's abode, and all that it contains. In Sura An-naba, nature references assume the shape of rhetorical questions as proof that the One who has created all this can also bring about the Day of Judgement:

Have We not made the **earth** as a wide expanse, And the mountains as pegs? [. . .] And do We not send down from the clouds water in abundance, That We may produce therewith corn and vegetables, And gardens of luxurious growth? Verily the Day of Sorting out is a thing appointed (78: 6-17)

In Sura an-Nahl, it is asked:

To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on **earth**, and to Him is duty due always: then will ye fear other than Allah? (16:52)

In the following passage from Sura Al Naml, attention is drawn to the creation of the heavens and the earth and all it contains such as "well-planted orchards full of beauty and delight", rivers, mountains, different earthly phenomena as well as man's own soul that cries out to its Lord in distress. In every verse, the earth image is employed. Question form is adopted. Every time man is asked the searching question "إِلَهَ مَعَ اللَّهِ" i.e. "(Can there be another) god besides Allah?" This question is repeated in every verse till the crescendo reaches its peak in (27:65).

Or, Who has created the heavens and the **earth**, and Who sends you down rain from the sky? Yea, with it We cause to grow well-planted orchards full of beauty and delight: it is not in your power to cause the growth of the trees in them. (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Nay, they are a people who swerve from justice. (27:60)

Or, Who has made the **earth** firm to live in; made rivers in its midst; set thereon mountains immovable; and made a separating bar between the two bodies of flowing water? (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Nay, most of them know not. (27:61)

Or, Who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on Him, and Who relieves its suffering, and makes you (Mankind) inheritors of the **earth**? (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Little it is that ye heed! (27:62)

Or, Who originates creation, then repeats it, and who gives you sustenance from heaven and **earth**? (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Say, "Bring forth your argument, if ye are telling the truth!" (27:64)

After all these questions to make disbelievers think, the answer itself is provided in the next verse:

Say: None in the heavens or on **earth**, except Allah, knows what is hidden: nor can they perceive when they shall be raised up (for Judgment). (27:65)

The earth image along with the same question- answer form is also adopted in (35:3), (35:40), (29:61), (29:63), (39:38) and (52:36).

9.5. DRAMATIC OPENING OF SURAS

Some suras containing the earth image open in a dramatic fashion. One of them is Sura an-Naba cited above that pertains to Doomsday. So is Sura al-Waqiah:

When the Event inevitable cometh to pass, Then will no (soul) entertain falsehood concerning its coming. (Many) will it bring low; (many) will it exalt; When the **earth** shall be shaken to its depths, and the mountains shall be crumbled to atoms, becoming dust scattered abroad, and ye shall be sorted out into three classes. (56:1-7)

The above sura opens in a dramatic fashion as a scene of cosmic upheaval is unfolded. With every verse the sense of catastrophe heightens till it reaches its peak in (56:7) as the Doomsday would also be the Day of Judgement.

Sura Al Inshiqaq also opens in a dramatic fashion:

When the sky is rent asunder, And hearkens to (the Command of) its Lord, and it must needs (do so) - And when the **earth** is flattened out, And casts forth what is within it and becomes (clean) empty, And hearkens to (the Command of) its Lord - and it must needs (do so) - (then will come Home the full reality). (84:1-5)

9.6. EARTH IN CONDITIONAL STATEMENTS INDICATING MAGNITUDE

At times, the earth image in the Qur'an is presented in the form of a conditional statement. The conditional statement coupled with the earth image indicates impossibility. This is reinforced by including heavens along with the earth and all that is in between. For example in (13:18):

For those who respond to their Lord, are (all) good things. But those who respond not to Him - even if they had all that is in the heavens and on

earth, and as much more, (in vain) would they offer it for ransom. For them will the reckoning be terrible: their abode will be Hell - what a bed of misery! (13:18)

The same idea is found in (39:47). In (10:54), it is said:

And if each soul that doeth wrong had **all that is in the earth** it would seek to ransom itself therewith; and they will feel remorse within them, when they see the doom. But it hath been judged between them fairly and they are not wronged. (Pickthall)

Every soul that hath sinned, if it possessed **all that is on earth**, would fain give it in ransom: They would declare (their) repentance when they see the Penalty: but the judgment between them will be with justice, and no wrong will be done unto them. (Ali)

Both the versions have been given here due to slightly different interpretations. The point being made here is that no matter what the non-believers might offer to escape punishment, even if they offer all the riches of the heavens and the earth, it would not be accepted from them.

The same idea is expressed in the following verse:

As to those who reject Faith, and die rejecting - never would be accepted from any such **as much gold as the earth contains**, though they should offer it for ransom. For such is (in store) a penalty grievous, and they will find no helpers. (3:91)

Pickthall translates it as follows:

“Lo! those who disbelieve, and die in disbelief, **the (whole) earth full of gold** would not be accepted from such an one if it were offered as a ransom (for his soul). Theirs will be a painful doom and they will have no helpers.” (3:91)

The earth image indicating magnitude is also employed in (8:63):

And (moreover) He hath put affection between their hearts: not if thou hadst spent **all that is in the earth**, couldst thou have produced that affection, but Allah hath done it: for He is Exalted in might, Wise.

All the above verses are conditional statements embodying a condition of impossibility. No soul can possess all that is in or on earth let alone “the (whole) earth full of gold” (3:91). However, even if it was possible, it “would not be accepted” from them (3:91) or “thou couldst not have attuned their hearts” (8:63).

An awe-inspiring earth image occurs indicating the impossibility of writing about the words of Allah:

And if all the trees on **earth** were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet would not the words of Allah be exhausted (in the writing): for Allah is Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom. (31:27)

9.7. PARABLES REGARDING EARTH

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, a parable is “(esp in the Bible) story told to illustrate a moral or spiritual truth”. The Quran also employs a number of parables to drive home its lessons. Al Zamakhshari comments that the “parables bring out the hidden imports, and lift up veils from the realities to the extent that the envisioned appears real, the imagination turns positively certain, and the non-existent exists” (qtd. by Khan, 237)¹.

Many parables employ the earth image. Some of them are as follows:

- a. He sends down water from the skies, and the channels flow, each according to its measure: But the torrent bears away the foam that mounts up to the surface. Even so, from that (ore) which they heat in the fire, to make ornaments or utensils therewith, there is a scum likewise. Thus doth Allah (by parables) show forth Truth and Vanity. For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the **earth**. Thus doth Allah set forth parables. (13:17)

Ali gives the following comments on the above verse:

This verse is full of parables. (1) It is Allah Who sends rain and sends it to all. See how it flows in different channels according to their capacities. Some are sluggish; some have a swift current. Some form great rivers and irrigate wide tracts of country; some are clear crystal streams, perhaps in hilly tracts, with beds of clean pebbles which you can see through the water. Some produce delicious edible fish: and some are infested by crocodiles or injurious monsters. And there are degrees, and degrees among brooks, streams, lakes, rivers, and seas. So with the rain of Allah's mercy and the knowledge and wisdom and guidance which He sends. All can receive it. Different ones will respond according to their capacities. (2) In the physical world, water is pure and beneficial. But froth and scum will gather according to local conditions. As the floods will carry off the scum and purify the water, so will the flood of Allah's spiritual mercy carry away our spiritual scum and purify the water. (3) The froth may make a greater show on the surface, but it will not last. So there will be frothy knowledge which will disappear, but Allah's knowledge will endure. (592)

[. . .] the fourth parable is that of metal ones (4) the ore is full of baser admixture, but the fire will separate the gold from the dross for ornaments, or (5) some metal of household utility, with which you make everyday utensils, which the fire will separate from admixtures which you do not want. So the fire of Allah's test, either by adversity or by affluence, will search out the true metal in us and reject the dross. It will show us what is valuable or what is useful, all sorts of scum and vanity which we collect and miscall knowledge." (592)

b. The following three verses of Sura Yunus embody two parables with reference to the earth. The first shows how even unbelievers cry out to Allah alone when caught in a tempest at sea. When He delivers them "they transgress insolently through the **earth** in defiance of right!":

He it is Who enableth you to traverse through land and sea; so that ye even board ships- they sail with them with a favourable wind, and they rejoice thereat; then comes a stormy wind and the waves come to them from all sides, and they think they are being overwhelmed: they cry unto Allah, sincerely offering (their) duty unto Him saying, "If Thou dost deliver us from this, we shall truly show our gratitude!" But when he delivereth them, behold! they transgress insolently through the **earth** in defiance of right! O mankind! your insolence is against your own souls - an enjoyment of the life of the present: in the end, to Us is your return, and We shall show you the truth of all that ye did. (10:22-23)

The Qur'an's imagistic and dramatic style is in evidence here. A scene imbued with life and movement is painted in verse twenty-two. The unbelievers are in a ship, cool breeze is blowing and they are happy when suddenly they are overwhelmed by waves from all sides. Here the focus is not only on the outward movement of the breeze and the waves but also the inner psychological state of the riders: "they rejoice thereat". However, their rejoicing proves to be of short duration as they are suddenly beset by a storm.

"Overwhelmed", "they cry unto Allah, making their faith pure for Him only" (Pickthall). At this point, narration in the third person is interrupted and dramatic mode is adopted "If Thou dost deliver us from this, we shall truly show our gratitude!". They are delivered and yet remain ungrateful working mischief through the land. They are then reminded by Allah "O mankind! your insolence is against your own souls".

c. Verse twenty-four of Sura Yunus gives a parable for the transitory life of this world:

The likeness of the life of the present is as the rain which We send down from the skies: by its mingling arises the produce of the earth- which

provides food for men and animals: (It grows) till **the earth is clad with its golden ornaments and is decked out (in beauty)**: the people to whom it belongs think they have all powers of disposal over it: There reaches it Our command by night or by day, and We make it like a harvest clean-mown, as if it had not flourished only the day before! Thus do We explain the Signs in detail for those who reflect. (10:24)

Ali interprets it as follows:

Another beautiful Parable, explaining the nature of our present life. The rain comes down in drops and mingles with the earth. Through it, by Allah's matchless artistry, the womb of the earth is made fruitful. All kinds of good, useful and beautiful grains, vegetables, and fruits are produced for men and animals. The earth is covered in its bravery of green and gold and all kinds of colours. Perhaps the 'owner' takes all the credit to himself, and thinks that this will last eternally. A hailstorm or blast, a frost or a volcanic eruption, comes and destroys it, or it may be even normally, that the time of harvest comes, and the fields and orchards are stripped bare by some blight or disease. Where is the beauty and bravery of yesterday? All that is left is dust and ashes! What more can we get from this physical material world? (486)

Asad translates “وَوَظَنَ أَهْلُهَا أَنَّهُمْ قَادِرُونَ عَلَيْهَا” in the verse above as “and they who dwell on

it believe that they have gained mastery over it”. He comments on it as follows:

I.e., they come to believe that they have gained “mastery over nature”, with no conceivable limits to what they may yet achieve. It is to be borne in mind that the term *zukunft* bears almost invariably a connotation of artificiality – a connotation which in this case is communicated to the subsequent verb *izzayyanat*. Thus, the whole of the above parabolic sentence may be understood as alluding to the artificiality, illusory “adornment” brought about by man's technological efforts, not in *collaboration* with nature but, rather, in hostile “confrontation” with it. (294)

9.8. ILTIFAT

One characteristic of Qur'anic style noted by Bell is a change in pronoun. Discussing verses from Sura Fatir, he says:

V. 11 is out of connection, and in v. 10 there is a sudden change from speaking of Allah in the third person, to the We – presumably Allah Himself speaking. The most natural explanation seems to be that the second part of v. 10 has been inserted into an older passage, and that in making the insertion a scrap of paper (or whatever the material was) has been used, on the back of which stood v. 11. (261)

Bell was unaware of the fact that the change in pronoun, called “Iltifat”, is, in fact, a feature of “balagha”. Balagha, according to Haleem, “...was undoubtedly one of the most important subjects for Qur’anic exegesis, and began and developed around the central question of the appreciation of the style of the Qur’an and its *i’jaz* in particular, as witnessed by such titles as *Dala’if al-i’jaz* of ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani” (159). Iltifat is considered to be a part of the dynamic style of the Quran.

Iltifat literally means “to turn / turn one’s face to”. In *iltifat*, a grammatical shift occurs “for rhetorical purposes” in person, number, addressee, tense, or case marker while referring to the same person/thing. The shift generally occurs at some semantically important point in the verse. Ibn al-Athir (637/1239), Zarkashi (794/1391), Sharaf-ud-din al-Tibi (743/ 1342), al-Khatib al-Qazwini (793/1395) as well as Suyuti (911/1505) all have discussed *iltifat* in detail (Haleem, 186-187).

Haleem cites Al-Zarkashi’s definition of *Iltifat* as “...the change of speech from one mode to another, for the sake of freshness and variety for the listener, to renew his interest, and to keep his mind from boredom and frustration, through having one mode continuously at his ear” (186-187).

Though Hatim and Mason do not use the technical term “iltifat”, they refer to it:

In the rhetoric of a number of languages, including Arabic, switching involves a sudden and unexpected shift from the use of one form (a particular tense or pronominal reference) to another from within the same set. In the area of pronominal reference, this may be illustrated by the switch from the first person, which may be the norm and therefore the expected option in a given co-text, to the second person, which in that co-text constitutes a departure from norm. (112)

Some examples of Iltifat containing the earth image are as follows:

(21:16) Not for (idle) sport did **We** create the heavens and the **earth** and all that is between!

(21:17) If it had been **Our** wish to take (just) a pastime, **We** should surely have taken it from the things nearest to **Us**, if **We** would do (such a thing)!

(21:18) Nay, **We** hurl the Truth against falsehood, and it knocks out its brain, and behold, falsehood doth perish! Ah! woe be to you for the (false) things ye ascribe (to **Us**).

021.019 To **Him** belong all (creatures) in the heavens and on **earth**: Even those who are in **His** (very) Presence are not too proud to serve **Him**, nor are they (ever) weary (of **His** service)

In the above verses, *iltifat* occurs from first person plural of majesty to third person singular while referring to the same being i.e. Allah in this case. In verses (21:16-18), Allah speaks directly. There is a sense of immediacy in these verses due to the use of the first person. Moreover, it is an expression of power and might. Verse (21:18) especially shows wrath “**We** hurl the Truth against falsehood, and it knocks out its brain, and behold, falsehood doth perish!”. Here the disbelievers are directly addressed: “Ah! woe be to you for the (false) things ye ascribe (to Us).” The shift occurs in (21:19) from first to third person. From the forceful and immediate interaction of (21:16-18) the perspective is changed in (21:19). It is as if the camera gives a close-up (21:16-18) and then moves to encompass the heavens and the earth and everything in between (21:19); a bird’s eye-view is given of the entire universe : “To **Him** belong all (creatures) in the heavens and on earth”. It is as if after this mighty assertion directly from Allah: “Not for (idle) sport did **We** create the heavens and the earth and all that is between! If it had been **Our** wish to take (just) a pastime, **We** should surely have taken it from the things nearest to **Us**, if **We** would do (such a thing)!”, the extent of His absolute power, might and dominion is shown where everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him and is neither too proud nor ever weary to serve Him. This is also a practical demonstration of obedience to the disbelievers who turn away from Allah due to their false pride. All this becomes possible due the dynamic feature of *iltifat* that “has been called by rhetoricians *shaja’at al-‘arabiyya* as it shows, in their opinion, the daring nature of the Arabic language” (Haleem, 185).

Hatim and Mason, in the chapter “Translating sacred and sensitive text”, state that “The motivation behind reference switching” can be explained in terms of “the need to break the monotony of speaking in one mode of reference”, “to ensure variety and lend discourse a particular vitality [. . .]”. Pronominal reference switching functions to:

- 1 relay a more supportive attitude and thus establish intimacy by, for example, involving the receiver in the communicative act;
- 2 underscore and specify certain concepts;
- 3 scold
- 4 exaggerate the wonder of the situation in which the addressee finds himself. (114)

It is seen that the pronominal reference-switching or *iltifat* in verses (21:16-19) fulfils these linguistic functions. So does the following verse where a shift occurs from the third to the first person while referring to Allah in both cases:

He created the heavens without any pillars that ye can see; **He** set on the **earth** mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you; and **He** scattered through it beasts of all kinds. **We** send down rain from the sky, and produce on the earth every kind of noble creature, in pairs. (31:10)

Here after showing mighty things that Allah has done i.e. creating heavens without pillars, setting firm mountains on earth and scattering every kind of beast on it, a shift suddenly occurs to the first person plural. The shift is effective as dramatic mode is suddenly adopted. This is a significant point in the verse as it avows the personal assertion of Allah in sending down rain and causing every kind of growth by its means. The importance of water is thus highlighted which is borne out by many other verses in the Quran such as (22:5), (22:63), (80:24-32), (67:30) and many others. Thus, this central concept comes into greater focus due to this reference switching. Moreover, it also “exaggerate(s) the wonder of the situation in which the addressee finds himself”. This point is significant as man generally takes all these blessings for granted. Haleem says about such an *iltifat* that “as it comes suddenly, the shift makes the listener feel afresh the true meaning of the concepts of both first person and of plurality, so that the grammatical forms are here given much more weight than they normally carry” (190).

9.9. CONCLUSION

The above discussion attempts to show the diversity of forms in which the earth image occurs. Some Qur’anic parables employing the earth image have been discussed. The stylistic feature of *Iltifat* has also been touched upon to highlight the dynamism of the Qur’anic discourse.

NOTES

1. See 5.5. for symbolism and allegory in the Qur'an.

CHAPTER 10

EARTH AND MAN

10.1 EARTH AND MAN

(Allah) said: "Get ye down, with enmity between yourselves. **On earth** will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood- for a time." He said: "**Therein shall ye live, and therein shall ye die; but from it shall ye be taken out (at last).**" (7:24-25)

"He Who has made for you the **earth** like a carpet spread out; has enabled you to go about therein by roads (and channels); and has sent down water from the sky." With it have We produced diverse pairs of plants each separate from the others. Eat (for yourselves) and pasture your cattle: verily, in this are Signs for men endued with understanding. **From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again.** (20:53-55)

"And Allah has produced you from the earth, growing (gradually), And in the End He will return you into the (earth), and raise you forth (again at the Resurrection)?" (71:17-18)

The above verses highlight the special relationship between the earth and man. Earth has been made for man (40:64), spread out "like a carpet" (71:19). All comforts and provisions have been made for him (15:20). Man has been created as Allah's *khalifa* on earth (2:30). This implies that he has to enforce Allah's law on earth which is the law of justice and mercy. This law has been sent through prophets for the guidance of mankind (16:36). If man enforces Allah's law on earth, the result is peace and tranquility. If he does not, the result is tumult and oppression. Man, in accordance with his intentions and actions, is rewarded or punished on this earth, in this worldly life as well as the Hereafter (24:55). His existence is a test (18:7). But Allah's mercy is such that all the right answers have already been taught to him if he would but learn. The following analysis focuses on various aspects of the theme of earth and man in the light of the Holy Quran.

10.2. MAN AS VICEGERENT

From Sura Baqara verse 30, it is made clear that man was created as a vicegerent on earth. Thus his status and role is defined quite early in the Quran. The creation of Adam which is referred to many times in the Quran is expounded here in some detail. Allah announces to the angels that He is going to create a vicegerent on earth:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "**I will create a vicegerent on earth.**"
They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?- whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not." (2: 30)

The expression "إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً" of the above verse is rendered by Asad as "I am about to establish upon **earth** one who shall inherit it." He says:

...The term *khalifah*- derived from the verb *khalafa*, "he succeeded [another]" – is used in this allegory to denote man's rightful supremacy on earth, which is most suitably rendered by the expression "he shall inherit the earth" (in the sense of being given possession of it). See also 6:165 ; 27:62 and 35:39, where all human beings are spoken of as *khala'if al-ard* (8).

Ali translates "خَلِيفَةً" as "vicegerent" here. He also translates it as "agent" in (6:165). According to him:

"Another idea implied in "khalifah" is that of "successor, heir, or inheritor," i.e. one who has the ultimate ownership after the present possessors, to whom a life tenancy has been given by the owner, have passed away" (343).

What does being a vicegerent entail?

"The perfect vicegerent is he who has the power of initiative himself, but whose independent action always reflects perfectly the will of his Principal" (Ali, 24). Thus, man becomes Allah's vicegerent when his actions are in accordance with the will of Allah. This, in fact, is the meaning of being a "muslim" i.e. one who submits his will to Allah. While a *kafir* is one who refuses to do so.

After God infuses His spirit in Adam, the angels are asked to bow down before him (2:34). A crucial point here is that before this happens Adam's superiority in knowledge (on the basis of the knowledge given to him by God) is established:

And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell me the names of these if ye are right." They said: "Glory to Thee: of knowledge We have none, save what Thou hast taught us: In truth it is Thou Who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom." He said: "O Adam! Tell them their natures." When he had told them, Allah said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and **earth**, and I know what ye reveal and what ye conceal?" (2:31-33)

Satan refuses to bow before Adam (2:34), and later is successful in seducing Adam and Eve who are then sent to the earth (2:36).

10.2.1. Man's Stay on Earth Is for a Short Period

It is made quite explicit in the Quran that man's stay on earth is to be for a short period and he is supposed to obey the guidance sent to him by his Lord:

Then did Satan make them slip from the (Garden), and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said: "Get ye down, all (ye people), with enmity between yourselves. On **earth** will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood - for a time." (2:36)

This idea is reinforced in Sura Al A'raf:

(Allah) said: "Get ye down. With enmity between yourselves. On **earth** will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood - for a time." He said: "Therein shall ye live, and therein shall ye die; but from it shall ye be taken out (at last)." (7:24-25)

How short a while man stays on earth is brought home in this verse:

He will say: "What number of years did ye stay on **earth**?" They will say: "We stayed a day or part of a day: but ask those who keep account." (23:112-113)

10.2.2. Man's Existence Is a Test (the Conflict between Good and Evil)

Man's existence on earth is a test. One side is the path of righteousness, on the other, the path of evil. Man can opt for either path. This is the test he has to take. The forces of good and evil are present in man's very nature. The greatest conflict is the inner conflict.

The fact that man's life is a test and every good and bad deed will be recompensed, forms part of a Muslim's *eeman* i.e. faith. There are many references to this fact in the Holy Quran. Many of them allude to the earth:

That which is on **earth** we have made but as a glittering show for the **earth**, in order that We may **test** them - as to which of them are best in

conduct. Verily what is on **earth** we shall make but as dust and dry soil (without growth or herbage) (18:7-8).

While Ali translates “زينة” in the verse above as “glittering show”, Asad translates it as “beauty”. His comment on (18:7) is as follows:

Lit., “We have made all that exists on earth as its **adornment** in order that We might put them [i.e., all human beings] to a test”: meaning that God lets them reveal their real characters in their respective attitudes – moral or immoral – towards the material goods and benefits which the world offers them. In further analysis, this passage implies that the real motive underlying men’s refusal to believe in God’s spiritual message (see preceding verse) is almost always their excessive, blind attachment to the good of this world, combined with a false pride in what they regard as their own achievements. (438)

Man is supposed to do good and eschew evil. He will be rewarded or punished accordingly:

Yea, to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and on **earth**: so that He rewards those who do evil, according to their deeds, and He rewards those who do good, with what is best. Those who avoid great sins and shameful deeds, only (falling into) small faults- verily thy Lord is ample in forgiveness. He knows you well when He brings you out of the **earth**, and when ye are hidden in your mothers’ wombs. Therefore justify not yourselves: He knows best who it is that guards against evil. (53: 31-32)

10.2.3. Allah Has Sent Prophets for Guidance

Man’s life on earth is chiefly a test. His death is but a doorway to an after life - a continuum of his earthly life where he will be fully requited for the deeds done by him on earth. It is, in fact, faith in after life that determines one’s outlook in this life as the one who believes in an after life feels accountable.

Man’s life is a test of choice. However, the right answers have already been revealed by sending Prophets. Adam was told on leaving paradise:

“We said: ‘Get ye down all from here: and if, as is sure, there comes to you Guidance from me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who reject Faith and belie Our Signs, they shall be companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein” (2:38-39).

Allah has sent His messengers amongst all nations:

For We assuredly sent amongst every People a messenger, (with the Command), "Serve Allah, and eschew Evil": of the People were some whom Allah guided, and some on whom error became inevitably (established). So travel through the **earth**, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth). (16:36)

All these ideas are embodied in the following verses:

It is He Who hath made you (His) agents, inheritors of the **earth**: He hath raised you in ranks, some above others: that He may try you in the gifts He hath given you: for thy Lord is quick in punishment: yet He is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (6:165)

10.2.4. Satan Is Responsible for Leading Men Astray

On one hand are the Prophets of Allah showing man the right path, on the other is Satan who wants to lead man astray. In fact, Satan challenged Allah:

(Iblis) said: "O my Lord! because Thou hast put me in the wrong, **I will make (wrong) fair-seeming to them on the earth**, and I will put them all in the wrong - (15:39)

Satan vows to mislead man. The expression he uses, "لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ", rendered by Pickthall as "I verily shall adorn the path of error for them in the earth", and Asad as "I shall indeed make [all that is evil] on earth seem goodly to them" is very significant. When man does something wrong it is because it appears "fair-seeming" and "goodly" to him. This is a matter of psychological insight. Man needs to think well of himself, have a "positive self-image" even when he is in the wrong. Therefore, man generally tries to justify himself. Maltz, a plastic surgeon and the pioneer of the discipline of Psychocybernetics says about the self-image that "each of us carries about with us a mental blueprint or picture of ourselves. It may be vague and ill-defined to our conscious gaze [. . .] This self-image is our own conception of the 'sort of person I am.'" The significant thing about this self-image is that "all your actions, feelings, behaviour – even your abilities – are always consistent with this self-image" (2).

Through various case histories, Maltz highlights the fact that everyone needs a positive self-image. People who do the most heinous of crimes against humanity assert that they are in the right. The cruelty, the viciousness, the vice and evil perpetrated by them only becomes conceivable with the realization that Satan makes "(wrong) fair-seeming to them". Justification of evil, no matter how terrible, is the trait of Satan himself in contrast

to Adam who repents after his lapse (7:23). This is borne out by Satan's accusation to Allah, "because Thou hast put me in the wrong" (15:39). Ali says in this context:

[. . .] Satan as the Power of Evil cannot be straight or truthful even before Allah. By his arrogance and rebellion he fell; he attributes this to Allah. Between Allah's righteous judgement and Satan's snares and temptations there cannot be the remotest comparison. Yet he presumes to put them on an equal footing. He is taking advantage of the respite. (626)

10.2.5. Man has been Given Free Choice

Since life is a test, man has been given the right to choose between good and evil. He can follow the guidance sent by Allah through the prophets and be one of the believers or he can turn his back and follow his vain desires (18:28) which appear "fair-seeming" and "goodly" (15:39) to him and be a follower of Satan. Allah has given man free choice as without free choice there can be no question of punishment or reward. This idea has been strikingly expressed in the following verse through employing the earth image:

If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed - all who are on **earth**! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe! No soul can believe, except by the will of Allah, and He will place doubt (or obscurity) on those who will not understand. Say: "Behold all that is in the heavens and on **earth**"; but neither Signs nor Warners profit those who believe not. (10:99 – 101)

Asad's translates the above verses somewhat differently:

And [thus it is:] had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on **earth** would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that thou couldst compel people to believe, notwithstanding that no human being can ever attain to faith otherwise than by God's leave, and [that] it is he who lays the loathsome evil [of disbelief] upon those who use not their reason? Say: "Consider whatever there is in the heavens and on **earth**!" but of what avail could all the messages and all the warnings be to people who will not believe?

The above verses are highly significant as they touch upon the question of free will versus predestination. Men have debated this issue since times immemorial. Asad comments:

The Quran stresses repeatedly the fact that, "had He so willed, He would have guided you all aright" (6:149) – the obvious implication being that He has willed it otherwise: namely, that He has given man the freedom to choose between right and wrong, thus raising him to the status of a moral

being (in distinction from other animals, which can only follow their instincts). (308)

10.2.6. The Majority of People on Earth Are Wrong-Doers

Wert thou to follow the common run of those on **earth**, they will lead thee away from the way of Allah. They follow nothing but conjecture: they do nothing but lie. (6:116)

Ever since times immemorial there have been diverse philosophies and systems of thought on earth. The majority of mankind has always followed these systems. The result has been tumult and oppression as none of these religions and schools of thought ensures justice tempered with mercy for everyone. This is why an oath has been taken making history itself a witness in Sura al-Asr:

By (the Token of) Time (through the Ages), verily Man is in loss, except such as have Faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of Patience and Constancy (103:1-3).

10.2.7. The Earth Is for the Righteous

The reward of the righteous is quite unlike those of the mischief-makers. Allah says:

Shall We treat those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, the same as those who do mischief on **earth**? Shall We treat those who guard against evil, the same as those who turn aside from the right? (38:28)

The righteous will be blessed in this world as well as the Hereafter. The earth, in fact, is for the righteous:

Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message (given to Moses): "My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the **earth**." (21:105)

An emphatic promise regarding the earth is made in the following verse:

Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the **land, inheritance (of power)**, as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion - the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: 'They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me. If any do reject Faith after this, they are rebellious and wicked. (24:55)

This is a very significant verse as it embodies Allah's promise that the righteous shall have a position of power on this earth. The Arabic expression used here "لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ" is in emphatic form indicating a promise that would definitely be fulfilled. This is glad tidings for the righteous and quite unlike the popular conception that if one follows Islam, one would lead a life of deprivation. Moreover, "لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ" also makes one recall that man has been created as "خَلِيفَةً" for earth. The above verse underlines the fact that only the righteous are truly Allah's "خَلِيفَةُ" on earth. Thus, they shall be the true inheritors of earth.

10.2.8. Those Who Follow Not Allah's Path Are the Losers

Anyone who follows Allah's path benefits his own self. In contrast, the wrong-doers wrong only themselves. They are the losers:

He it is that has made you inheritors in the **earth**: if, then, any do reject (Allah), their rejection (works) against themselves: their rejection but adds to the odium for the Unbelievers in the sight of their Lord: their rejection but adds to (their own) undoing. (35:39)

According to Asad, "...God's having made man "inherit the earth" implies the grant to him of the ability to discern between right and wrong as well as between truth and falsehood" (671). Therefore those who leave His path do so out of their own free will and are therefore culpable:

"Those who would hinder (men) from the path of Allah and would seek in it something crooked: these were they who denied the Hereafter!" They will in no wise frustrate (His design) on **earth**, nor have they protectors besides Allah! Their penalty will be doubled! They lost the power to hear, and they did not see! (11:19-20)

In this world, many times evil appears to be victorious while the good suffers. The believers are consoled:

Never think thou that the Unbelievers are going to frustrate (Allah's Plan) on **earth**: their abode is the Fire - and it is indeed an evil refuge! (24:57)

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) is commanded:

Say: "Call upon other (gods) whom ye fancy, besides Allah: They have no power- not the weight of an atom - in the heavens or on **earth**: No (sort of) share have they therein, nor is any of them a helper to Allah. (34:22)

The same idea is also repeated in (39:63), (46:29) and (46:32).

10.2.9. Man Has Been Given Limited Powers

And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on **earth**: Behold, in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect. (45:13)

All progress man has made on earth as well as in space is an illustration of the above verse. The Arabic expression “وَسَخَّرَ لَكُم” in the verse above has been translated by Asad as “And He has made subservient to you”. Pickthall translates it as “And hath made of service unto you” and Daryabadi as “and He hath subjected for your sake’.

All that is in the heavens and on **earth** has been made subservient to man. However, on the whole his power is limited. He cannot cross the boundaries of time and space. Today’s man with all the power of atomic and nuclear energy at his command as well as all his experience of space exploration is doubly aware of the truth of the following verse:

“O ye assembly of Jinns and men! If it be ye can pass beyond the zones of the heavens and the **earth**, pass ye! not without authority shall ye be able to pass!” (55:33)

10.2.10. Allah can Bring a New Creation in Place of Man

Man in the headiness of his power forgets his limitations. He forgets that he is accountable to anyone. Any time Allah so wills He can remove man and put a new creation in his place:

Seest thou not that Allah created the heavens and the **earth** in Truth? If He so will, He can remove you and put (in your place) a new creation? (14:19)

Man cannot even conceive of the omnipotence of Allah who has created the heavens and the earth once and can do so again whenever He so wishes. Man is asked:

"Is not He Who created the heavens and the **earth** able to create the like thereof?" - Yea, indeed! for He is the Creator Supreme, of skill and knowledge (infinite)! (36:81)

10.2.11. Man’s Ultimate Return to Allah

As man’s stay on earth is for a short period, he ultimately has to return to his Lord:

And He has multiplied you through the **earth**, and to Him shall ye be gathered back. (23:79)

(67:24) is almost identical:

Say: "It is He Who has multiplied you through the **earth**, and to Him shall ye be gathered together." (67:24)

That will be the Day of the final reckoning:

Be quite sure that to Allah doth belong whatever is in the heavens and on **earth**. Well doth He know what ye are intent upon: and one day they will be brought back to Him, and He will tell them the truth of what they did: for Allah doth know all things. (24:64)

(43:85) and (39:44) also reiterate that man shall be brought back to his Lord. Both these verses incorporate the earth image to reinforce this idea.

10.3. PROVISION OF ALL COMFORTS FOR MAN ON EARTH

"It is He Who hath created for you all things that are on **earth**; then He turned to the heaven and made them into seven firmaments; and of all things He hath perfect knowledge." (2:29)

This verse is very significant as it shows how much honour Allah has bestowed upon the sons of Adam. All on earth has been made subservient to man. At the same time, it is incumbent upon him to enforce Allah's law as he is Allah's vicegerent on earth.

The same idea is repeated in the following verse:

Seest thou not that Allah has made subject to you (men) all that is on the **earth**, and the ships that sail through the sea by His Command? He withholds the sky (rain) from falling on the earth except by His leave: for Allah is Most Kind and Most Merciful to man. (22:65)

10.3.1 The Earth Made a Fit Abode for Man

Amongst the known planets of the solar system, the earth is the only one that has the right conditions to support life. The Holy Quran directs the attention of man to the fact that the earth has been spread out for him, and provided with everything necessary to support life. Man tends to take all these blessings for granted and forgets to be grateful to Allah.

Luqman told his son:

Do ye not see that Allah has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on **earth**, and has made his bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen? Yet there are among men those who dispute about Allah, without knowledge and without guidance, and without a Book to enlighten them! (31:20)

As Ali says: “Allah’s creation is independent of man. But Allah, in His infinite mercy, has given man the faculty to subdue the forces of nature and to penetrate through high mysteries with his powers of reason and insight...” (1039).

At times the earth image assumes interrogative form. Man is asked:

Say: Is it that ye deny Him Who created the **earth** in two Days? And do ye join equals with Him? He is the Lord of (all) the Worlds. He set on the (earth), mountains standing firm, high above it, and bestowed blessings on the **earth**, and measured therein all things to give them nourishment in due proportion, in four Days, in accordance with (the needs of) those who seek (sustenance). (41:9-10)

Instead of “two days”, Asad translates “يَوْمَيْنِ” in the above verse as “aeons”. According to him:

[. . .] As in so many verses of the Quran which relate to cosmic events, the repeated mention of “six aeons” during which the universe was created – “two” of which, according to the above verse, were taken by the evolution of the inorganic universe, including the earth – has a purely allegorical import: in this case, I believe, an indication that the universe did not exist “eternally” but had a definite beginning in time, and that it required a definite time-lapse to evolve to its present condition. (731)

10.3.2. The Earth Made an Expanse

The Quran is very rich in earth imagery. There are repeated references to the earth being “spread out” for man:

“And it is He who **spread out the earth**, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers: and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two: He draweth the night as a veil o’er the Day. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who consider!” (13:3)

And the **earth** - **We have spread it out**, and set thereon mountains standing firm, and produced therein every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs)- (50:7)

And We have **spread out the (spacious) earth**: How excellently We do spread out! (51:48)

It is He Who has **spread out the earth** for (His) creatures (55:10)

Different verbs are used with reference to the spreading out of the earth e.g. “مَدَّهَا”

(50:7), “فَرَشْنَاهَا” (51:48), “وَضَعْنَاهَا” (55:10). The above translation is of Ali. Pickthall

renders “فَرَشْنَاهَا” (51:48) as “the earth have We laid out” while Asad translates it as “the earth have we spread out wide”. In the translation of (55:10) also, Asad’s version is closer to Ali’s. He translates it as “And the earth has He spread out for all living beings”. Pickthall, on the other hand, translates it as “And the earth hath He appointed for (His) creatures”. In the translation of other verbs pertaining to the earth also, similar differences are observed.

The earth has been made a “couch” (فَرَاشًا):

Who has made the **earth your couch**, and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when ye know (the truth). (2:22)

It is also “a resting place” (مَقَرًّا):

It is Allah Who has made for you the **earth as a resting place**, and the sky as a canopy, and has given you shape- and made your shapes beautiful - and has provided for you Sustenance, of things pure and good - such is Allah your Lord. So Glory to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds! (40:64)

Another expression used with reference to the earth is “بَسَاطًا” in the following verse:

And Allah has made **the earth for you as a carpet (spread out)** (71:19)

The earth is “an expanse”: “طَبَاقًا” in (91:6); “ذَخَاهَا” i.e. “extended (to a **wide expanse**)” in (79:30):

And the earth, moreover, hath He extended (to a wide expanse); (79:30)

By the Earth and its (wide) expanse: (91:6)

Here an oath as been used with reference to the expanse of the earth. This shows its great significance as the oath is from Allah, the Lord of the universe. If the earth was not the “(wide) **expanse** (91:6)” it is, life as it exists now on earth would not have existed. Allah has placed mountains as pegs to balance it, created a wide variety of landscape like forests, deserts, hills and valleys on it, made provision of water and every subsistence for life. Along with this all, He made everything beautiful. The earth and all it contains, as everything else in the universe, is a masterpiece of His artistry.

10.3.3. Provision of Water

Provision of water is a great blessing of Allah from which all vegetation grows to support man and beasts:

And We send down water from the sky according to (due) measure, and We cause it to soak in the **soil**; and We certainly are able to drain it off (with ease). (23:18)

“الارض” has been translated as “soil” here. Ali takes into consideration the entire water cycle while commenting on the above verse:

Normally the rain comes well distributed; it soaks into the soil; the moisture is retained for a long time in all high grounds; it soaks and penetrates through many layers of soil and forms the architecture of physical geography; the retentive powers of higher soil enable rivers to flow even where, as in India, the rainfall is seasonal and confined to a few months in the year. Another form in which water comes down from the sky according to due measure is in snow and hail: these also have their place in the economy of air and soil. Were it not for snow and glaciers in the higher mountain regions, some of the rivers would fail in their abundant flow. As wonderful as the supply of water and moisture is its drainage. It returns to the sea and air in all sorts of ways, and the formation of mists and clouds repeats the cycle. Were it not for the drainage and the clearance of the waters, we should have floods and water-logging, as happens when the normal processes of nature are temporarily obstructed the same thing happens when the rain comes down in other than due measure. These abnormal conditions also have their value. But how grateful should man be for Allah’s gifts in the ceaseless processes of nature on such an enormous scale! (846)

How great a blessing water is and how much man takes it for granted can be gauged from this verse: “Say: ‘See ye? If your stream be some morning lost (in the underground earth), who then can supply you with clear-flowing water?’” (67:30).

10.3.4 Growth of Plants, Trees, Vegetation, Fruits, Cereals, etc.

Repeatedly, attention is drawn to the bounties of the Lord who has provided on the earth all manner of fruits and vegetation for man and animals:

It is He Who has spread out the **earth** for (His) creatures: Therein is fruit and date-palms, producing spathes (enclosing dates); Also corn, with (its) leaves and stalk for fodder, and sweet-smelling plants. Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? (55:10-13)

10.3.5. Animals for Milk, Meat, Riding, Leather, etc.

Amongst all that has been created on earth for the comfort of man are animals. They have been the earliest means of transportation. Man has benefited from them in numerous other ways as well. Furs and fabrics, milk and meat, carrying of heavy loads as well as “a sense of pride and beauty in them”, all these blessings have been given to man by Allah through animals:

And cattle He has created for you (men): from them ye derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) ye eat. And ye have a sense of pride and beauty in them as ye drive them home in the evening, and as ye lead them forth to pasture in the morning. And they carry your heavy loads to lands that ye could not (otherwise) reach except with souls distressed: for your Lord is indeed Most Kind, Most Merciful, And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for show; and He has created (other) things of which ye have no knowledge. (16:5-8)

10.3.6. Alteration of Day and Night for Time Management

Amongst the things man takes for granted is the alteration of day and night. Allah has made the night for rest. The day, lit by the sun, makes possible every kind of activity to ensure life. The very survival of life for plants and man is dependent upon the sun. The night, with the peace and quiet it brings, is equally indispensable. Many verses in the Quran draw man's attention towards these phenomena:

He created the heavens and the **earth** in true (proportions): He makes the Night overlap the Day, and the Day overlap the Night: He has subjected the sun and the moon (to His law): Each one follows a course for a time appointed. Is not He the Exalted in Power - He Who forgives again and again? (39:5)

And it is He who spread out the **earth**, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers: and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two: He draweth the night as a veil o'er the Day. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who consider! (13:3)

10.3.7. Provision of Economic Means

Allah has not just spread out the earth, created the sun, moon and stars, created life on earth, made man the vicegerent and bestowed power on him. Rather He provided all means to man “for the fulfillment of [. . .] life”; yet man takes it all for granted:

It is We Who have placed you with authority on **earth**, and provided you therein with means for the fulfilment of your life: small are the thanks that ye give! (7:10)

Ali comments on this verse:

That is, all the material things which are necessary to sustain, beautify and refine life, as well as all those powers, faculties, and opportunities which are instrumental in bringing up life to a higher plane and preparing man for his high spiritual destiny. (346)

The Almighty provided for the sustenance of not just man but each and every one of His creatures, even those of whose existence man is not aware. He is the “رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ” i.e. “the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds”:

And We have provided therein means of subsistence- for you and for those for whose sustenance ye are not responsible. (15:20)

10.3.8. Provision of Means of Transportation

Animals are one source of transportation given to man. Besides them, all means of transportation and communication on land, water, air and space, though invented by man, have been made possible as Allah has subjected them to man. Man uses them for his benefit due to the intelligence and creativity bestowed upon him by Allah:

It is Allah Who hath created the heavens and the **earth** and sendeth down rain from the skies, and with it bringeth out fruits wherewith to feed you; it is He Who hath made the ships subject to you, that they may sail through the sea by His command; and the rivers (also) hath He made subject to you. (14:32)

The following verses focus on the blessing of Allah that the earth, being spread out, becomes traversable for man, through roads and channels:

He Who has, made for you the **earth** like a carpet spread out; has enabled you to go about therein by roads (and channels); and has sent down water from the sky." With it have We produced diverse pairs of plants each separate from the others. (20:53)

In the verse above, the expression “سَبِيلًا” is significant. According to Ali, “*Sabīl* means not only a road, but would include water-roads or channels, and in modern conditions, airways – in fact all means of communication” (774).

It is He Who has made the **earth** manageable for you, so traverse ye through its tracts and enjoy of the Sustenance which He furnishes: but unto Him is the Resurrection. (67:15)

Here man is being reminded that all the gifts bestowed on him are temporary as he has to return to his Lord.

10.4. THE EARTH AND THE SIGNS OF ALLAH

A study of Quran reveals that the earth is a symbol, a sign of Allah (as discussed in 8.2.). Moreover, all that the earth contains, all the natural phenomena that manifest on its surface, pertaining to bliss or punishment, are the signs of Allah. However, these signs are manifest only to those who have been blessed with the “seeing eye”, whose hearts are not blind. That is why the Quran says: “Do they not travel through the **land**, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts” (22:46).

The following analysis focuses on some verses from Al-Quran that contain the earth image and refer to the signs of Allah:

10.4.1. The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth and All It Contains Are Signs

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the **earth**; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the Ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the **earth** - (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise. (2:164)

Starting with the creation of the heavens and the earth, the above verse encompasses all the natural phenomena that sustain life on earth such as the changing of night and day; sailing of ships ensuring transportation, trade, fishing, extractions of pearls and corals; coming of rain giving life to earth and all that is on it such as plants, animals and thus man himself; the processes of nature involved in the water cycle such as the change of winds, formation of clouds, coming of rain (the reference to rain first and winds and clouds later indicates the continuation of this cyclical process). The conclusion of it all is that all these are the signs of Allah for wise people:

And it is He who spread out the **earth**, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers: and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two: He draweth the night as a veil o'er the Day. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who consider! (13:3)

The above verses are an indication of the Quranic style where in a few words a wealth of meaning is conveyed. In (13:3) there is a reference to the creation of the earth, of the mountains to balance it, of fruits and the fact that their creation is in pairs, as well as the alteration of day and night. All this appears to have been done in little or no time. This idea is reinforced from elsewhere in the Quran as the limitations of time and space are only for the creatures not for the Creator. There are references to the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days (7:54) which naturally are not the six days of human beings (Asad, 211).

Another feeling that one gets while reading this ayat is of a power who is above and beyond human comprehension as a bird's eye view is given here. The same style is adopted at many other places in the Quran as in Sura al-Baqara and Yasin. The Quran also contains other verses incorporating the earth image where the creation of heavens and earth in true proportions (29:44), variation in languages and colours, sleep during night and quest for livelihood during morning, lightening, rain (30:22-24), alternation of day and night and all that the heavens and the earth contain (10:6), creation of all things of every kind on earth (26:7-8) are mentioned as the signs of Allah.

10.4.2. The Creation of the Heavens and the Earth in Six Days

There are many references in the Quran regarding the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days:

We created the heavens and the **earth** and all between them in Six Days, nor did any sense of weariness touch Us. (50:38)

In the verse above, Asad does not translate “**يَوْمًا**” as “days”; rather he translates it as “aeons”¹. According to him:

[. . .] in ancient Arabic usage the term *yawm* does not always denote the twenty-four hours of the “earthly” day, but is also applied to any period of time, however long or short. In the cosmic sense in which it is used here and elsewhere in the Quran, the plural *ayyam* is best rendered as “aeons” (800).

10.4.3. All in the Heavens and the Earth Obey Allah

Everything in the heavens and the earth obeys Allah. The model of obedience is there for man to emulate in the nature around him:

Do they seek for other than the Religion of Allah?-while all creatures in the heavens and on **earth** have, willing or unwilling, bowed to His Will (Accepted Islam), and to Him shall they all be brought back. (3:83)

Ali comments on this verse thus:

[. . .] All Nature adores Allah, and Islam asks for nothing peculiar or sectarian; it but asks that we follow our nature and make our will conformable to Allah's Will as seen in Nature, history and revelation. Its message is universal" (149).

Another thought-provoking verse states:

Whatever beings there are in the heavens and the **earth** do prostrate themselves to Allah (acknowledging subjection) - with good-will or in spite of themselves: so do their shadows in the mornings and evenings (13:15).

According to Asad:

The expression *yasjud* ("prostrate himself" or "prostrate themselves") is a metonym for complete submission to His will (Zamakhshari), that is, to the natural laws decreed by Him with regard to everything that exists. According to most of the classical commentators, those who submit to Allah willingly (i.e., consciously) are the angels and the believers, whereas the deniers of the truth, who are "not willing" to submit to Him, are nevertheless, without being conscious of it, subject to His will. However, in view of the subsequent reference to "shadows" it is logical to assume that the relative pronoun *man* relates in this context not merely to conscious beings but also to all other physical objects, whether animate or inanimate – i.e., to "all things and beings that are in the heavens and on earth" (361).

The following verse repeats the same idea:

To Him belongs every being that is in the heavens and on **earth**: all are devoutly obedient to Him. (30:26)

If everything did not obey Allah, the universe would not be running smoothly on its prescribed course. Man is advised to do the same:

O Mankind! The Messenger hath come to you in truth from Allah: believe in him: It is best for you. But if ye reject Faith, to Allah belong all things in the heavens and on **earth**: And Allah is All-knowing, All-wise. (4:170)

10.4.4. The Heavens and the Earth Have Not Been Created in Vain

It was not in vain that the universe was created. This idea is referred to repeatedly in the Quran alluding to the earth and heavens:

Not for (idle) sport did We create the heavens and the **earth** and all that is between! (21:16)

Ali says:

The Hindu doctrine of Lila, that all things were created for sport, is here negated. But more; with Allah we must not associate any ideas but those of Truth, Righteousness, Mercy, Justice, and the other attributes implied in His Beautiful Names. He does not jest nor play with His creatures. (798)

Verses (38:27), (44:38) and (46:3) express the same idea. This idea that Allah created this universe for just ends and not for sport is very important because it determines one's outlook in life. The disbelievers who believe that this ordered universe came into being of its own accord are in error manifest. They are asked:

Do they not reflect in their own minds? Not but for just ends and for a term appointed, did Allah create the heavens and the **earth**, and all between them: yet are there truly many among men who deny the meeting with their Lord (at the Resurrection)! (30:8)

Why did Allah create this universe? The answer to this very important question is provided by the Holy Quran:

Allah created the heavens and the **earth** for just ends, and in order that each soul may find the recompense of what it has earned, and none of them be wronged. (45:22)

10.4.5. Who Will Understand Allah's Signs?

Allah has made everything on earth a sign. The earth itself is a sign of Allah. However, not everyone understands these signs of Allah. Only those who have faith and fear Allah, those endowed with faith profit by them:

Verily in the heavens and the **earth**, are Signs for those who believe. And in the creation of yourselves and the fact that animals are scattered (through the earth), are Signs for those of assured Faith. (45:3-4)

On the **earth** are signs for those of assured Faith (51:20)

10.4.6. Signs for men of understanding (لَذِكْرِي لَؤُيِي النَّابِ)

It is faith that leads to understanding. There are frequent references in the Quran to men of understanding and to the fact that they understand the signs of Allah. These are the men who are wise:

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the **earth**, and the alternation of night and day - there are indeed Signs for men of understanding (3:190)

Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and leads it through springs in the **earth**? Then He causes to grow, therewith, produce of various colours: then it withers; thou wilt see it grow yellow; then He makes it dry up and crumble away. Truly, in this, is a Message of remembrance to men of understanding. (39:21)

And in the alternation of Night and Day, and the fact that Allah sends down Sustenance from the sky, and revives therewith the **earth** after its death, and in the change of the winds - are Signs for those that are wise. (45:5)

Such wise men reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth:

And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on **earth**: Behold, in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect. (45:13)

10.4.7. Proof of Allah's Sovereignty

Foremost amongst the lessons these men of understanding learn after reflecting on the signs of Allah, is His Sole Sovereignty.

A great example in this regard is that of Abraham (pbuh) who is shown the power and laws of the heavens and the earth:

So also did We show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the **earth**, that he might (with understanding) have certitude. (6:75)

This leads him to say:

"For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the **earth**, and never shall I give partners to Allah." (6:79)

10.4.8. Proof of Resurrection

Resurrection and Judgement are amongst the foundation stones of Muslim faith². There are repeated references to both in the Quran. A persuasive style is adopted and the fact of the dead earth being brought to life again is presented as proof of resurrection:

O mankind! if ye have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then (foster you) that ye may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (much), and (further), thou seest the **earth** barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs). This is so, because Allah is the Reality: it is He Who gives life to the dead, and it is He Who has power over all things (22:5-6).

In the above verse all the different stages of the creation of man from dust, then sperm, then the different stages the embryo passes through in the womb, then birth, childhood, youth and lastly old age are presented as a proof of resurrection. Man finds none of them strange as he is familiar with them. As further proof, the fact of the dead earth being brought to life after rainfall is mentioned. Similar references to the earth being brought to life and its similarity with resurrection is also made in (30:19) and (30:50)³.

10.4.9. Fruits of Different Taste from the Same Earth Watered by the Same Source

The Holy Quran directs man's attention to the fact that from the same earth watered by the same source, Allah causes a variety of fruits, vegetables and flowers to be grown. For those who reflect, this constitutes a sign of Allah:

And in the **earth** are tracts (diverse though) neighbouring, and gardens of vines and fields sown with corn, and palm trees - growing out of single roots or otherwise: watered with the same water, yet some of them We make more excellent than others to eat. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who understand! (13:4)

10.4.10. Travel Through the Land

Many verses in the Quran emphasize travel through the land. They draw man's attention to the ruins of the previous nations who were destroyed for their willful disobedience:

Many were the Ways of Life that have passed away before you: travel through the **earth**, and see what was the end of those who rejected Truth. (3:137)

The imperative form “فَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا” i.e. “So travel through the earth, and see” is generally adopted. This expression occurs with slight variation in (16:36), (30:42), (27:69) as well as (6:11).

At times question form is adopted to drive home the idea:

Do they not travel through the **earth**, and see what was the end of those before them? They were superior to them in strength: they tilled the soil and populated it in greater numbers than these have done: there came to them their messengers with Clear (Signs). (Which they rejected, to their own destruction): It was not Allah Who wronged them, but they wronged their own souls. (30:9)

The expression “أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ” i.e. “Do they not travel through the **earth**, and see what was the end of those before them?” repeatedly occurs with slight variations in (12:109), (35:44), (40:21), (47:10) as well as (40:82).

So much emphasis in the Quran on travel through the earth, to look at the remains of previous nations, is a testimony of its importance. When man sees *with his own eyes* how mighty the previous nations were and how they were destroyed for their disobedience to Allah, he is more likely to learn righteousness:

Do they not travel through the **earth** and see what was the End of those before them? They were more numerous than these and superior in strength and in the traces (they have left) in the land: Yet all that they accomplished was of no profit to them. (40:82)

Ali gives a detailed analysis of the verse above:

For any generation to take inordinate pride in its own single achievements in science or skill becomes ridiculous if we consider the broad stream of history. In the first place, men will find that a great deal of what they attribute to their own merits only became possible owing to the earlier

work of their predecessors. Secondly, many of their predecessors were more numerous and mightier in power than they, although the perspective of time may have reduced the apparent depth of their influence, and the monuments which they have left behind may have suffered from the destroying hand of Time. Thirdly, and most important of all, when they forgot Allah and His inexorable Law, nothing of their own handiwork profited them: they perished in the common ruin as all vanities must perish (1227).

All the above arguments are clinched in the following verse:

Do they not travel through the **land**, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts (22:46).

Here a metaphor has been employed with reference to those who do not believe. Those who profit not from Allah's signs and travel through the earth do not have any physical short-coming. Apparently they have eyes and ears yet they cannot see or hear that which would profit them. The Almighty attributes it to *blindness of heart* i.e. an unwillingness to understand as "the word for 'heart' in Arabic speech imports both the seat of intelligent faculties and understanding as well as the seat of affections and emotions" (Ali, 834).

10.4.11. Prediction before Doomsday

A strange prediction occurs in the Quran with reference to Doomsday:

And when the Word is fulfilled against them (the unjust), we shall produce from the **earth** a beast to (face) them: He will speak to them, for that mankind did not believe with assurance in Our Signs (27:82).

Ali interprets the "beast" as one of the signs of the Last Day. He says that "in symbolic language it would represent gross Materialism. It will be the embodiment of fat worldly triumph, which will appeal to a misguided and degenerate world, because such a corrupt world will have no assured belief in the Signs of Allah or in spiritual Light (956)".

Asad interprets the above verse as allegory. He says:

The "creature brought forth out of the earth" is apparently an allegory of man's "earthly" outlook on life – in other words, the soul-destroying materialism characteristic of the time preceding the Last Hour. This "creature" parabolically "tells" men that their submergence in exclusively materialistic values – and hence, their approaching self-destruction – is an outcome of their lack of belief in God. (587)

10.5. EARTH AND THE THEME OF “فَسَاد”

Translated by Ali and Pickthall as “mischief” and Asad as “corruption”, “فساد” emerges as a very important theme in the Qur'an with reference to the earth. There are numerous verses in the Quran enjoining upon men not to make mischief, enumerating the traits of mischief makers and expressing Allah's extreme wrath and displeasure for such folk.

A study of the “qasas” i.e. narratives in the Quran brings home the fact that the message of all prophets was the same. All of them asked their people to fear Allah and work not mischief through the land. The attitude of the mischief-makers is embodied in this verse:

When it is said to them: "Make not mischief on the **earth**," they say:
"Why, we only want to make peace!" (2:11)

The Al-mighty comments in the next verse:

Of a surety, they are the ones who make mischief, but they realize (it) not.
(2:12)

A most thought-provoking verse comes in Sura Mu'minun:

وَلَوْ أَتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ بَلْ أَتَيْنَاهُمْ بِذِكْرِهِمْ فَهُمْ
عَنْ ذِكْرِهِمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ

If the Truth had been in accord with their desires, truly the heavens and the **earth**, and all beings therein would have been in confusion and corruption! Nay, We have sent them their admonition, but they turn away from their admonition (23:71).

“الحق”, translated as “truth”, according to Asad is “the reality of all creation” (526). He translates “وَلَوْ أَتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ” as “the heavens and the earth would surely have fallen into ruin, and all that lives in them [would long ago have perished]!”. According to his interpretation, “if the universe – and, especially, human life - had been as devoid of meaning and purpose as they imagine, nothing could have endured, and everything would have long since perished in chaos” (526).

Daryabadi interprets “وَلَوْ أَتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ” as “and were the universe to be governed in accordance with the whims and fancies of these petty creatures”. His interpretation of

“تَفْسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ” is that “confusion and corruption, ruin and destruction would have spread all round” (201).

Ali's interpretation is as follows:

Allah is All-wise and All-Good, and His architecture of the universe is on a perfect Plan. If these poor, low, selfish, ignorant creatures were to plan it according to their hearts' desires, it would be a dreadful world full of confusion and corruption (855).

Allah is the most just and most merciful. His “رَحْمَةً” (mercy) encompasses everything in the heavens and the earth. He makes his bondsmen undergo trials and tribulations in order to purify and strengthen them as gold is heated in fire to remove dross (13:17). Man, in contrast, is selfish by nature and his actions are motivated by self-interest. If men's desires (أَهْوَاءُهُمْ) had the ordering of the universe, the end result could be nothing aught “ruin”, “confusion and corruption”.

10.5.1. The mischief-makers

All evil, injustice and corruption on earth is attributable to those who are termed in al-Quran as “الْمُفْسِدِينَ”. These mischief-makers are:

Those who break Allah's Covenant after it is ratified, and who sunder what Allah has ordered to be joined, and do mischief on **earth**: These cause loss (only) to themselves (2:27).

Asad interprets “Allah's Covenant” (or “bond with God” according to his translation) as:

Man's moral obligation to use his inborn gifts – intellectual as well as physical – in the way intended for them by God. The “establishment” of this bond arises from the faculty of reason which, if properly used, must lead man to a realization of his own weakness and dependence on a causative power and, thus, to a gradual cognition of God's will with reference to his own behaviour [. . .] “bond with God” stands for something that is rooted in the human situation as such, and can, therefore, be perceived instinctively as well as through conscious experience [. . .]. (8)

A detailed character sketch of a mischief-maker is given in the following verse:

There is the type of man whose speech about this world's life may dazzle thee, and he calls Allah to witness about what is in his heart; yet is he the most contentious of enemies. When he turns his back, his aim everywhere

is to spread mischief through the **earth** and destroy crops and cattle. But Allah loveth not mischief. (2:204-205)

Such a character is a hypocrite with a glib tongue. Moreover, he might hide behind a cloak of religiosity as “he calls Allah to witness”. Asad cites Az-Zajjaj (quoted by Razi) that “this signifies a person who is always able to defeat his opponent in a controversy by the use of extremely adroit and often misleading arguments” (44). Analyzing the expression “وَيَهْلِكُ الْخَرْثُ وَالنَّسْلُ” in the verse above, which he translates as “destroying [man’s] tilth and progeny”, Asad interprets it as “synonymous with an upsetting of family life and, consequently, of the entire social fabric” resulting in “widespread moral decay and, consequently, social disintegration” (45).

A look at the world scenario proves that this word picture of a mischief-maker is as true today as it was fifteen hundred years ago. Today, utter destruction and wreck of dwellings and crops is carried out in the name of peace. The so-called war on terrorism is, in fact, the worst sort of violation of human rights. The war on terrorism might, in fact, be termed a “war of semantics” where black can be painted as white and white as black. All this highlights the truth of these words “There is the type of man whose speech about this world’s life may dazzle thee [. . .]”.

10.5.2. Allah loveth not mischief makers

Allah’s religion is the religion of peace. This is embodied in the very word “Islam”. The concept of Jihad emerges from the fact that the earth should be purged of injustice. Allah expresses His extreme displeasure towards mischief- makers:

But those who break the Covenant of Allah, after having plighted their word thereto, and cut asunder those things which Allah has commanded to be joined, and work mischief in the **land** - on them is the curse; for them is the terrible home! (13:25)

Extreme wrath has been expressed for such evil-doers in (5:33):

The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the **land** is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the **land**: that is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter (5:33).

The earth has been translated as “land” in the verses above.

Man is asked:

Why were there not, among the generations before you, persons possessed of balanced good sense, prohibiting (men) from mischief in the **earth** - except a few among them whom We saved (from harm)? But the wrong-doers pursued the enjoyment of the good things of life which were given them, and persisted in sin (11:116).

About "those in whose hearts is a disease" (47:20) and who obey not Allah, it is said:

Then, is it to be expected of you, if ye were put in authority, that ye will do mischief in the **land**, and break your ties of kith and kin? Such are the men whom Allah has cursed for He has made them deaf and blinded their sight. (47:22-23)

10.5.3. The Mischief-Makers Understand Not the Signs of Allah

A significant point that emerges from the study of the earth image from this perspective is that the mischief-makers do not understand the signs of Allah. This is made clear quite early in Sura al-Baqara:

Allah disdains not to use the similitude of things, lowest as well as highest. Those who believe know that it is truth from their Lord; but those who reject Faith say: "What means Allah by this similitude?" By it He causes many to stray, and many He leads into the right path; but He causes not to stray, except those who forsake (the path) - Those who break Allah's Covenant after it is ratified, and who sunder what Allah Has ordered to be joined, and *do mischief on earth*: These cause loss (only) to themselves (2: 26-27).

Such people turn their faces away from the signs of Allah:

And how many Signs in the heavens and the **earth** do they pass by? Yet they turn (their faces) away from them! (12:105)

10.6. THE EARTH AND PUNISHMENT

Allah, Who has created man and provided for him all blessings on earth, expects man to act in accordance with his nature which demands obedience to Him. If man obeys Him he finds true happiness and peace; if he disobeys, the result is tumult and oppression.

When injustice reaches its peak, Allah's wrath is invoked and disobedient nations are punished. The earth with all its blessings and comforts becomes an instrument of Divine wrath and punishment. In spite of all its spaciousness, it becomes narrow and constrained (9:25) when Allah so wills⁴. Winds and water, the means of sustaining life on earth,

suddenly become a scourge for willful nations. This is borne out by the “الْقَصَصِ” i.e. the narratives of the prophets. How the earlier nations were punished for their willful disobedience can be gathered from this verse:

(Remember also) Qarun, Pharaoh, and Haman: there came to them Moses with Clear Signs, but they behaved with insolence on the **earth**; yet they could not overreach (Us). Each one of them We seized for his crime: of them, against some We sent a violent tornado (with showers of stones); some were caught by a (mighty) Blast; some We caused the **earth** to swallow up; and some We drowned (in the waters): It was not Allah Who injured (or oppressed) them: They injured (and oppressed) their own souls. (29:39-40)

Tornadoes, earthquakes, tempests, cyclones, showers of stones- all are instruments of Allah's wrath that are let loose on man when he transgresses and causes mischief, corruption and cruelty on earth:

See they not how many of those before them We did destroy? - generations We had established on the **earth**, in strength such as We have not given to you - for whom We poured out rain from the skies in abundance, and gave (fertile) streams flowing beneath their (feet): yet for their sins We destroyed them, and raised in their wake fresh generations (to succeed them). (6:6)

Contrasting states of bliss and punishment are evident in this verse. There were nations who were given unparalleled strength; rain – a sign of Allah's mercy – was showered upon them causing growth of fruits and plants. In other words physical prowess, power and prosperity attended them. But they were destroyed by Allah due to their transgressions and new generations were raised to succeed them.

Arrogance is the primal sin that causes the downfall of nations. When nations become arrogant and think that they have absolute power, they are punished. 'Ad was one such nation:

Now the 'Ad behaved arrogantly through the **land**, against (all) truth and reason, and said: "Who is superior to us in strength?" What! did they not see that Allah, Who created them, was superior to them in strength? But they continued to reject Our Signs! So We sent against them a furious Wind through days of disaster, that We might give them a taste of a Penalty of humiliation in this life; but the Penalty of a Hereafter will be more humiliating still: and they will find no help. (41:15-16)

The same lesson is learnt from the narrative of Noah:

Before them the People of Noah rejected (their messenger): they rejected Our servant, and said, "Here is one possessed!", and he was driven out. Then he called on his Lord: "I am one overcome: do Thou then help (me)!" So We opened the gates of heaven, with water pouring forth. And We caused the **earth** to gush forth with springs, so the waters met (and rose) to the extent decreed. (54:9-12)

Here the instrument of punishment is water which otherwise sustains and nourishes life. But in this case "the torrents of rain above combined with the gush of waters from underground springs, and caused a huge Flood which inundated the country" (Ali 1388).

The earth, by Allah's command, acts as a sanctuary for man - providing for him all comforts and blessings. Unfortunately, man starts thinking that the earth is his rather than Allah's. Allah reminds man that the same earth can "swallow" him up if He so wills⁵. All the verses below adopt interrogative mode to make man pause and ponder:

See they not what is before them and behind them, of the sky and the **earth**? If We wished, We could cause the **earth** to swallow them up, or cause a piece of the sky to fall upon them. Verily in this is a Sign for every devotee that turns to Allah (in repentance). (34:9)

Do then those who devise evil (plots) feel secure that Allah will not cause the **earth** to swallow them up, or that the Wrath will not seize them from directions they little perceive? (16:45)

Do ye feel secure that He Who is in Heaven will not cause you to be swallowed up by the **earth** when it shakes (as in an earthquake)? (67:16)

10.7. BEHAVIOUR OF MEN OF UNDERSTANDING

Quranic study reveals that mankind is divisible into two main groups: the wrong-doers and the righteous. The righteous are those who submit to Allah and follow Islam as the true religion:

[. . .] This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion [. . .]
(5:3)

The behaviour of the true believers on earth is quite unlike that of the wrong-doers. The following verses highlight different aspects of their behaviour:

(They are) those who, if We establish them in the **land**, establish regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong: with Allah rests the end (and decision) of (all) affairs. (22:41)

10.7.1. They Contemplate the Creation of the Heavens and the Earth

The contemplation of a reflecting heart leads to the discernment of truth. For men of understanding, there are signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth:

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the **earth**, and the alternation of night and day - there are indeed Signs for men of understanding - men who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the **earth**, (with the thought): "Our Lord! not for naught Hast Thou created (all) this! Glory to Thee! Give us salvation from the penalty of the Fire. (3:190-191)

This attitude is in contrast to the attitude of those who believe that the world came into being by chance or that all has been created for sport. Consequently the ups and downs of life do not make sense to such people who complain that "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods/ They kill us for their sport" (King Lear IV.i).

10.7.2. They Walk on the Earth with Humility

True faith breeds humility while arrogance is the legacy of Satan. Every word, gesture and action of a believer shows humility as he attributes all that he has to Allah. He considers his every success as Allah's favour upon him rather than owing to his own intelligence and calibre:

And the servants of (Allah) Most Gracious are those who walk on the **earth** in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace!" (25:63)

The "ignorant", according to Ali, are ignorant in a spiritual sense while "address" has the implied meaning of addressing aggressively (904). Thus, the true believers do not waste time in vain disputes. At the same time even when they are addressed aggressively, they respond courteously.

The same attitude is evident in Luqman's advice to his son:

"And swell not thy cheek (for pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the **earth**; for Allah loveth not any arrogant boaster (31:18).

10.7.3. They Sing the Praises of Allah

The true believer considers Allah as his only true friend and protector. He turns to Him in adversity as well as prosperity. He sings the praises of Allah and prays for faith and guidance till the last breath. The prayer of Hazrat Yusuf is an embodiment of this attitude:

"O my Lord! Thou hast indeed bestowed on me some power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events - O Thou Creator of the heavens and the **earth**! Thou art my Protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Take Thou my soul (at death) as one submitting to Thy Will (as a Muslim), and unite me with the righteous." (12:101)

10.8. HOW TO LIVE ON EARTH

Allah has made the earth for man. How can man live a happy and healthy life on earth? This question is of utmost importance. The One Who has created man as well as the earth has provided guidance in this regard. The following verses embodying the earth image contain guidance about living on earth:

10.8.1. Believe in Allah

Man is told:

"Lord of the heavens and of the **earth**, and of all that is between them: so worship Him, and be constant and patient in His worship: knowest thou of any who is worthy of the same Name as He?" (19:65)

Ali comments on this verse as follows:

The more we taste of the truth and mystery of life, the more do we realize that there is no one to be mentioned in the same breath as Allah. He is above all names. But when we think of His beautiful qualities, and picture them to ourselves by names which give us some ideas of Him, we can search the whole wide world of our imagination, and we shall not find another to be compared with Him in name or quality. He is the One: praise be to Him (757).

10.8.2. Put Thy Trust in Allah

To Allah do belong the unseen (secrets) of the heavens and the **earth**, and to Him goeth back every affair (for decision): then worship Him, and put thy trust in Him: and thy Lord is not unmindful of aught that ye do (11:123).

When man trusts his affairs to Allah, he becomes free from worries of all kinds. This is because Allah is the protecting friend of the righteous. He does not forsake those who place their trust in Him. While Satan leads man astray, Allah guides and protects man:

And the Unbelievers said to their messengers: "Be sure we shall drive you out of our **land**, or ye shall return to our religion." But their Lord inspired (this Message) to them: "Verily We shall cause the wrong-doers to perish!" And verily We shall cause you to abide in the **land**, and succeed them. This for such as fear the Time when they shall stand before My tribunal - such as fear the punishment denounced." (14:13-14)

The occasion of "Hudaibia" was a real test of faith where the Muslims, few in number compared to the infidels of Mecca, took an oath on the Prophet's hand to fight till death:

It is He Who sent down Tranquility into the hearts of the Believers, that they may add faith to their faith - for to Allah belong the Forces of the heavens and the **earth**; and Allah is Full of Knowledge and Wisdom (48:4)

The Quran called the Treaty of Hudaibiyah "a manifest Victory" (فَتْحًا مُبِينًا) (48:1).

10.8.3. Eat, Drink of the Good Things and Avoid Evil

Islam does not forbid man to enjoy good food:

O ye people! Eat of what is on **earth**, Lawful and good; and do not follow the footsteps of the Evil One, for he is to you an avowed enemy. (2:168)

What is important is that it should be both lawful and good. Lawful i.e. "حَلَالًا" means both that it should have been lawfully earned as well as allowed by Allah to be eaten. Regarding good i.e. "طَيِّبًا", Ali takes it to mean "pure, clean, wholesome, nourishing, pleasing to the taste" (67).

10.8.4. Be Humble

Man, on account of the blessings bestowed upon him by Allah tends to become arrogant. There have been men like Pharoah and Nimrod who claimed to be gods. Man is told:

Nor walk on the **earth** with insolence: for thou canst not rend the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height (17:37).

A striking image has been used in the verse above to make man realize his weakness and limitations. Physical prowess, wealth and power generally lead man to think himself

superior to others. This attitude becomes evident from his very gait. He is reminded that no matter how strong he might become, he can neither rend the earth asunder nor attain the height of mountains.

Pride is the original sin that leads to all other sins and the end result is damnation:

And on the Day that the Unbelievers will be placed before the Fire, (It will be said to them): "Ye received your good things in the life of the world, and ye took your pleasure out of them: but today shall ye be recompensed with a Penalty of humiliation: **for that ye were arrogant on earth without just cause, and that ye (ever) transgressed.**" (46:20)

Regarding the expression "أَذْهَبْتُمْ طَيِّبَاتِكُمْ" in the verse above, Ali says that "*Received your good things* implies (in Arabic) grabbing at them, being greedy of them, seeking them as fleeting pleasures rather than the most serious things of life, sacrificing the spiritual for the material" (1309).

10.8.5. Spend In The Way Of Allah

Spending in the way of Allah is greatly encouraged. However, one should not give in charity that which is bad:

O ye who believe! Give of the good things which ye have (honourably) earned, and of the fruits of the **earth** which We have produced for you, and do not even aim at getting anything which is bad, in order that out of it ye may give away something, when ye yourselves would not receive it except with closed eyes. And know that Allah is Free of all wants, and worthy of all praise (2:267).

Detailed instructions have been provided as to who deserves charity:

(Charity is) for those in need, who, in Allah's cause are restricted (from travel), and cannot move about in the **land**, seeking (for trade or work): the ignorant man thinks, because of their modesty, that they are free from want. Thou shalt know them by their (unfailing) mark: They beg not importunately from all and sundry, and whatever of good ye give, be assured Allah knoweth it well. (2:273)

"أَرْضُ" has been translated as "land" in the verse above.

The Muslims are asked:

And what cause have ye why ye should not spend in the cause of Allah?
For to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the **earth** [. . .]
(57:10)

Withholding the gifts Allah has given man is a way of arousing His wrath:

And let not those who covetously withhold of the gifts which Allah Hath given them of His Grace, think that it is good for them: Nay, it will be the worse for them; soon shall the things which they covetously withheld be tied to their necks like a twisted collar, on the Day of Judgement. To Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the **earth**; and Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do (3:180).

10.8.6. Be United

In unity lies strength. The Muslims are told:

The Unbelievers are protectors, one of another: Unless ye do this, (protect each other), there would be tumult and oppression on **earth**, and great mischief (8:73).

Ali comments on the verse above:

Evil consorts with evil. The good have all the more reason for drawing together and not only living in mutual harmony but being ready at all times to protect each other. Otherwise the world will be given over to aggressions by unscrupulous people, and the good will fail in their duty to establish Allah's Peace and to strengthen all the forces of truth and righteousness (434).

10.9. PRAYERS

The earth image occurs in the Quran in diverse contexts. One of them is the matter of prayers.

10.9.1. Shortening of Prayers

When ye travel through the **earth**, there is no blame on you if ye shorten your prayers, for fear the Unbelievers May attack you: For the Unbelievers are unto you open enemies (4:101).

Permission is granted here to shorten congregational prayers on a journey. "The practice of the Prophet shows that danger is not an essential condition; it is merely mentioned as a possible incident" (Ali, 218).

10.9.2. Instruction for Friday Prayers

O ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (the Day of Assembly), hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of Allah, and leave off business (and traffic): That is best for you if ye but knew! And when the Prayer is finished, then may ye disperse through the **land**, and seek of the Bounty of Allah: and celebrate the Praises of Allah often (and without stint): that ye may prosper (62:9-10).

In contrast to the Jewish and Christian Sabbath, Friday for the muslims is not necessarily a day of rest. While the Friday prayers are obligatory, they can go about their business once the prayers are finished (Ali, 1469). It is an opportunity for the Muslims to come into contact with one another and strengthen social ties as all of them gather in one place at the same time for the same goal i.e. the remembrance of Allah.

10.10. JIHAD

Jihad is amongst the most misunderstood of Islamic concepts. This holy war has to start with one's own self i.e. *jihad an-nafs* which means trying to subdue the negative traits and weaknesses in oneself. The one who engages in jihad is called a "mujahid". According to Asad:

The term *mujahid* is derived from the verb *jahada*, which means "he struggled" or "strove hard" or "exerted himself", namely, in a good cause and against evil. Consequently, *jihad* denotes "striving in the cause of God" in the widest sense of this expression: that is to say, it applies not merely to physical warfare (*qital*) but to any righteous struggle in the moral sense as well; thus, for instance, the Prophet described man's struggle against his own passions and weaknesses (*jihad an-nafs*) as the "greatest *jihad*" (Bayhaqi, on the authority of Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah) (124).

There are different types and gradations of jihad, armed conflict being the final stage. The idea is to fight oppression and corruption and establish Allah's Law on earth which is the rule of justice and mercy.

If one loses one's life in this struggle one attains martyrdom or "shahadah" which is a means of earning Allah's good pleasure. This is a most desirable state for a believer who is not afraid of death as death is but a gateway to eternal gardens of bliss for a martyr i.e. *shahid*.. The Holy Quran says:

O ye who believe! Be not like the Unbelievers, who say of their brethren, when they are travelling through the **Earth** or engaged in fighting: "If they

had stayed with us, they would not have died, or been slain." This that Allah may make it a cause of sighs and regrets in their hearts. It is Allah that gives Life and Death, and Allah sees well all that ye do (3:156).

The believers are asked:

O ye who believe! what is the matter with you, that, when ye are asked to go forth in the cause of Allah, ye cling heavily to the **earth**? Do ye prefer the life of this world to the Hereafter? But little is the comfort of this life, as compared with the Hereafter (9:38).

The earth image has been employed in a symbolic way in the verse above. “أَتَقْلَسُمُ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ”, translated as “ye cling heavily to the **earth**”, by both Ali and Asad, is expressive of an attitude of unwillingness. Asad interprets it as “you are sluggish in your response, clinging to the life of this world” (265). Moreover, “أَتَقْلَسُمُ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ” also recalls the expression “أَخْلَدَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ” in (7:176) translated by Asad as “he always clung to the earth” where the earth emerged as a symbol of materialism in contrast to spiritual values⁶.

10.11. MIGRATION

The earth image also appears with regard to migration which is a theme closely linked to jihad. If one is not in a position to practice Allah's *deen* in a place nor is it possible for him to strive for the prevalence of Islam, migration becomes obligatory. To lead life in sin rather than migrate and then offer persecution as an excuse would not be acceptable except for those who are really unable to do so (4:98):

When angels take the souls of those who die in sin against their souls, they say: "In what (plight) were ye?" They reply: "Weak and oppressed were we in the **earth**." They say: "Was not the **earth** of Allah spacious enough for you to move yourselves away (From evil)?" Such men will find their abode in Hell - What an evil refuge! (4:97)

Incentive for migration is provided giving the reminder that Allah's earth is very spacious:

He who forsakes his home in the cause of Allah, finds in the **earth** many a refuge, wide and spacious: Should he die as a refugee from home for Allah and His Messenger, His reward becomes due and sure with Allah: And Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (4:100).

10.12. CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this chapter to give an overview of the earth image in the Qur'an as it pertains to man and his life. The overview is, of necessity, very sketchy. However, it might give an idea of the breadth of the canvas covered by the earth image in the Qur'an.

NOTES

1. See 10.3.1.
2. Discussed at greater length in Chapter 12.
3. Discussed in 6.20.1. and 8.3.1.
4. See 6.20.5.
5. Also see 4.4. and 8.3.9.
6. See 8.4. for a discussion of this expression.

CHAPTER 11

THE EARTH IMAGE AND THE MANIFESTATION OF ALLAH'S ATTRIBUTES

11.1. INTRODUCTION

A very large number of verses in the Quran deal with Allah's attributes. Many of them employ the earth image. Reference is made to the creation of the earth and the different natural phenomena that appear on it as proof of Allah's Sole Sovereignty, His Wisdom, Knowledge, Mercy, Wrath, etc. Some of the verses showing different Divine attributes while alluding to the earth are as follows:

11.2. SOLE SOVEREIGNTY WITHOUT PARTNERS (TAUHEED)

Allah is the Sole and Supreme Sovereign of the universe. This concept known as *tauheed* is the foundation of Muslim faith. Allah's Sovereignty is referred to in the Quran by repeated allusions to the heavens and the earth as created and sustained by Him alone:

They say "Allah hath begotten a son". Glory be to Him – Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on **earth**: everything renders worship to Him. (2:116)

Ali comments on this verse:

It is a derogation from the glory of Allah – in fact it is blasphemy – to say that Allah begets sons, like a man or an animal. The Christian doctrine is here emphatically repudiated. If words have any meaning, it would mean an attribution to Allah of a material nature, and of the lower animal functions of sex. (49)

Everything in the heavens and on earth follows Islam i.e. pursues the natural course determined for it by Allah. In contrast, man has been given the will to choose. The disbelievers are asked:

Do they seek for other than the Religion of Allah? - while all creatures in the heavens and on **earth** have, willing or unwilling, bowed to His Will (accepted Islam), and to Him shall they all be brought back. (3:83)

Ali translates “قُلْتُ اسْلَمَ” in the verse above as “bowed to His Will (accepted Islam)”, Pickthall as “unto Him submitteth” while Asad translates it as “unto Him [. . .] surrenders itself”.

There are people who believe that this universe has come into being of its own accord and life is meaningless. But the Quran says:

He has created the heavens and the **earth** for just ends: Far is He above having the partners they ascribe to Him! (16:3)¹

As the above verses indicate, the earth image is repeatedly and consistently employed with reference to the attributes of Allah, the chief most being His Sovereignty without partners. The creation of the heavens and the earth and all that is in between is the biggest proof of His being the Sole Creator. According to Ali, “surely the Unity of Design in Creation also proves the Unity of Allah their Creator” (637). People are asked to look at creation and marvel over the creativity of the Creator who is running this ordered universe. Interrogative form is adopted to make men think:

Say: “Who is the Lord and Sustainer of the heavens and the **earth**?” Say: “(It is) Allah.” Say: ‘Do ye then take (for worship) protectors other than Him, such as have no power either for good or for harm to themselves?’ Say: “Are the blind equal with those who see? Or the depths of darkness equal with Light?” Or do they assign to Allah partners who have created (anything) as He has created, so that the creation seemed to them similar? Say: “Allah is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the Supreme and Irresistible”. (13:16)²

In the verse above attention is drawn to many attributes of Allah, the foremost being *taufeed*. Divine attributes generally occur in combination. Two of Allah’s attributes have been combined in the following verse i.e. His Sole Sovereignty and Knowledge:

They serve, besides Allah, things that hurt them not nor profit them, and they say: “These are our intercessors with Allah.” Say: “Do ye indeed inform Allah of something He knows not, in the heavens or on **earth**? - Glory to Him! and far is He above the partners they ascribe (to Him)!” (10:18)

All prophets have bore witness to *taufheed* i.e. the Sole Sovereignty of Allah. They frequently refer to Allah's greatness and His attributes. In Sura Kahf, about "Ashab-e-Kahf" i.e. "the Companions of the Cave", it is said:

We gave strength to their hearts: Behold, they stood up and said: "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and of the **earth**: never shall we call upon any god other than Him: if we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity! (18:14)

Some other verses where the earth image occurs with reference to Allah's Sovereignty without partners are (10:66), (10:68), (43:82), (43:84) and (44:7). The earth image is referred to so extensively with reference to Allah's attributes that it is not possible to cite all references. Besides *taufheed*, the earth image is referred to with many other attributes of Allah. Some of these are as follows:

11.3. THE ORIGINATOR OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH

(بَدِيعُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ)

All primal origins are from Allah, including the primal origin of the universe itself. This is manifest from the following verse:

To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the **earth**: When He decreeth a matter, He saith to it: "Be," and it is. (2:117)

"بَدِيعُ" is translated as "The Originator" by Pickthall while Ali translates it as "To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the **earth**" in (6:101) as follows:

To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the **earth**: How can He have a son when He hath no consort? He created all things, and He hath full knowledge of all things. (Ali)

The Originator of the heavens and the **earth**! How can He have a child, when there is for Him no consort, when He created all things and is Aware of all things? (Pickthall)

The above verse highlights different Divine attributes. Firstly that Allah is the Originator of the heavens and the earth; secondly that He is without wife or child; thirdly that He is the Creator and lastly that His Knowledge is Absolute. In (2:117), reference is made to the fact that as soon as He decrees something, it is.

Shemseddin Halveti Al-Jerrahi, in the Ninety-nine Names of Allah, states the meaning of “بَدِيع” as “The Incomparable - He who creates wonders in the universe without any design”. Ali gives a detailed analysis of this name as follows:

Bada'a goes back to the very primal beginning, as far as we can conceive it. The materialists might say that primeval matter was eternal: other things, i.e., the forms and shapes as we see them now, were called into being at some time or other, and will perish. When they perish, they dissolve into primeval matter again, which stands at the base of all existence. We go further back. We say that if we postulate such primeval matter, it owes its origin to Allah, Who is the final basis of existence, the Cause of all Causes. (50)

11.4. THE MAKER OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH

(فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ)

There are fine gradations of difference and subtle shades of meaning that occur with Allah's attributes. This is one reason why the translation of the Holy Quran becomes such a challenging task. One of Allah's attributes is “فَاطِر” which is distinct from “بَدِيع”. Daryabadi translates “بَدِيع” as “The Originator”. He translates “فَاطِر” as “Maker” and explains it as the “Creator out of nothing, by His mere all-powerful Will. Pickthall translates both as “The Originator”. In contrast, Ali translates “بَدِيع” as “To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth” and “فَاطِر” as “Maker”:

Say: "Shall I take for my protector any other than Allah, the Maker of the heavens and the earth? And He it is that feedeth but is not fed." Say: "Nay! but I am commanded to be the first of those who bow to Allah (in Islam), and be not thou of the company of those who join gods with Allah." (6:14)

Ali distinguishes between “فَاطِر” and “بَدِيع” by focusing on their root verbs:

Fatara (42:11) implies, like *bada'a*, the creating of a thing out of nothing and after no pre-existing similitude, but perhaps *fatara* implies the creation of primeval matter to which further processes have to be applied later, as when one prepares dough but leaves the leavening to be done later. (50)

In Sura Fatir, named after Allah's Divine name “فَاطِر”, the first verse reads:

Praise be to Allah, Who created (out of nothing) the heavens and the earth, Who made the angels, messengers with wings,- two, or three, or four (pairs): He adds to Creation as He pleases: for Allah has power over all things. (35:1)

Ali says:

As man's knowledge of the processes of nature advances, he sees how complex is the evolution of matter itself, leaving out the question of Life and the spiritual forces, which are beyond the ken of experimental science. But this knowledge itself becomes a sort of "veil of Light"; man becomes so conscious of the proximate causes, that he is apt, in his pride, to forget the primal Cause, the Cause of Causes, the ultimate Hand of Allah in Creation. [. . .] The word *fatara* here used means the creation of primeval matter, to which further creative processes have to be added by the Hand of Allah, or Allah "adds to His Creation as He pleases", not only in quantity, but in qualities, function, relations, and variations in infinite ways. (1101)

In the following verse, Ali translates "فَاطِرٌ" as "Creator":

(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the **earth**: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees (all things). (42:11)

11.5. LORD OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH

(رَبَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَرَبَّ الْأَرْضِ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ)

The Quran starts with Sura Fatiha where Allah is praised as "رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ" i.e. the Lord of the universe. He is also referred to as "رَبَّ الْأَرْضِ" i.e. Lord of the earth in Sura al-Jathiya:

Then Praise be to Allah, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the **earth** - Lord and Cherisher of all the Worlds! To Him be glory throughout the heavens and the **earth**: and He is Exalted in Power, Full of Wisdom! (45:36-37)

Ali says:

The Arabic word *Rabb*, usually translated Lord, has also the meaning of cherishing, sustaining, bringing to maturity. Allah cares for all the worlds He has created.

There are many worlds – astronomical and physical worlds, worlds of thought, spiritual world, and so on. In everyone of them, Allah is all-in-all. (14)

Daryabadi also translates Rabb as Lord - "i.e., its Creator and Preserver. Even so simple a truth as that the earth is a created being stood in need of special emphasis in view of the widely-spread worship of the 'Mother-World' [. . .]" (185).

Abraham, one of the most revered of prophets, said:

He said, "Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the **earth**, He Who created them (from nothing): and I am a witness to this (Truth). (21:56)

11.6. HIS MONARCHY AND DOMINION

Allah is the Most Sovereign of all sovereigns as no one except Him can claim the monarchy and dominion of the earth, the heavens and all that is in between i.e. the entire universe. This is manifest from Abraham's dispute with Nimrod when Abraham asked him to bring out the sun from the west instead of the east and Nimrod who claimed Godhood was lost for an answer. In the Holy Quran, it is said:

Knowest thou not that to Allah belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the **earth**? And besides Him ye have neither patron nor helper. (2:107)

The great Throne Verse shows Allah's dominion and Monarchy over the heavens as well as the earth:

Allah! There is no god but He - the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on **earth**. Who is there can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) before or after or behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the **earth**, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory). (2:255)

The expression "كُرْسِيَّةٌ" i.e. "His Throne" in Ayah al Kursi symbolizes Allah's Dominion and Monarchy. According to Ali, "Throne" means "seat, power, knowledge, symbol of authority" (106). Asad translates it as "eternal power" though he mentions that literally it means "His seat [of power]" while Zamakhshari interprets it as "His sovereignty" or "His dominion" and Razi as God's majesty and indescribable, eternal glory (Asad, 57).

To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth (20:6; 24:42; 25:2; 57:5; 65:12; 3:189; 4:126; 10:55); all in the heavens and the earth are obedient to Him (19:93). Allah's dominion is such that He is the one who gives life and death (9:116; 57:2); bestows children (42:49); forgives or punishes (48:14); all affairs are referred back to Him (57:5). Even the shadows of His creation prostrate themselves before Him:

Whatever beings there are in the heavens and the **earth** do prostrate themselves to Allah (Acknowledging subjection) - with good-will or in spite of themselves: so do their shadows in the morning and evenings. (13:15)

His are the mysteries of the heavens and the earth:

To Allah belongeth the Mystery of the heavens and the **earth**. And the Decision of the Hour (of Judgment) is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker: for Allah hath power over all things. (16:77)

Even the birds in the air celebrate His praise:

Seest thou not that it is Allah Whose praises all beings in the heavens and on **earth** do celebrate, and the birds (of the air) with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise. And Allah knows well all that they do. (24:41)

11.7. THE SUSTAINER

Allah is the Sustainer of all who are in the heavens and on earth. Man might think that whatever “رزق” he gets is due to his own ability and hard work. In fact, it is Allah who determines the sustenance of each of His creatures:

There is **no moving creature on earth but its sustenance dependeth on Allah**: He knoweth the time and place of its definite abode and its temporary deposit: All is in a clear Record. (11:6)

To Him belongs the keys of the heavens and the **earth**: He enlarges and restricts the Sustenance to whom He will: for He knows full well all things. (42:12)

“رزق” i.e. sustenance, according to Ali, “stands for all things that support every phase of life, physical, social, intellectual or spiritual” (1248). Every creature of Allah is dependent on Him alone for the fulfillment of all his needs:

“Of Him seeks (its need) every creature in the heavens and on **earth**: every day in (new) Splendour doth He (shine)!” (55:29)

Man with his limited vision might think that if he had the power, he would have made everyone on earth prosperous. The All-wise Allah says a most thought-provoking thing:

If Allah were to enlarge the provision for His Servants, they would indeed transgress beyond all bounds through the **earth**; but He sends (it) down in due measure as He pleases. For He is with His Servants Well-acquainted, Watchful. (42:27)

11.8. ALLAH RULES AND REGULATES ALL AFFAIRS

Allah rules and regulates everything in the heavens and on earth. Finality rests with Him alone:

To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and on **earth**: To Him do all questions go back (for decision) (3:109).

He rules (all) affairs from the heavens to the **earth**: in the end will (all affairs) go up to Him, on a Day, the space whereof will be (as) a thousand years of your reckoning. (32:5)

“يَدِيرُ الْأَمْرَ” in (32:5) has been translated by Pickthall as “He directeth the ordinance”.

Asad translates it as “He governs” and Al-Hilali as “He manages and regulates (every) affair”. The significant point is that His governance and regulation is full of wisdom though human beings might fail to understand His “حِكْمَةً”. He watches over each one of His creatures. He can bring good out of evil as Adam says in Paradise Lost:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good. (Xii, 469- 471)

11.9. THE LIGHT OF ALLAH

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the **earth**. The parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass; the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things (24:34).

All light in the heavens and the earth is from Allah. In fact, He Himself is the Light of the heavens and the earth. All light as all guidance is from Him. The Light Verse has already been discussed in 8.5.

11.10. HIS ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE

Human beings have been endowed with little knowledge. The most learned is the one who knows that he knows but little. Human knowledge is constrained by time, place and

space. In contrast, Allah's knowledge is absolute and above and beyond time and place. Following are some of the verses pertaining to Allah's knowledge in the Qur'an. They give some idea of the depth, the width and the absoluteness of His knowledge. The earth image has been used in unusual ways in some of them:

With Him are the keys of the Unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the **earth** and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered), but is (inscribed) in a Record clear (to those who can read). (6:59)

If one ponders over this verse, it adds new dimensions to the word "knowledge" itself as the breadth and scope of such knowledge is inconceivable. Who can have knowledge of every falling leaf and every "grain amid the darkness of the earth" except Allah?

A study of earth imagery in the Quran with reference to Divine attributes reveals that Allah's Knowledge holds special significance. A very large number of verses reiterate the fact that He has knowledge of all that is in the heavens and on earth. If man becomes convinced that Allah is with him wherever he may be (57:4), his every thought, word and action is in Allah's knowledge (13:33), being witnessed as well as recorded (27:75; 10:61; 22:7), that this record would be produced and he would be punished or rewarded accordingly (58:7), man would be saved from following the path of sin and evil.

No man can know what is hidden in another man's breast. What is hidden in the heart can be as unfathomable as the depths of an immeasurable ocean. Yet Allah knows the secrets of the heart:

He knows what is in the heavens and on **earth**; and He knows what ye conceal and what ye reveal: yea, Allah knows well the (secrets) of (all) hearts. (64:4)

Ali comments thus on this verse:

Not only does He create and develop and sustain all things; but all thoughts, motives, feelings, ideas, and events are known to Him. Therefore we must not imagine that, if some evil seems to go unpunished, it is not known to Him or has escaped His notice. His plan is wise and good in its fullest compass: sometimes we do not see its wisdom and goodness because we see only a broken fragment of it, as our own intelligence is narrow. (1477)

The same subject incorporating the earth image occurs in (27:74), (2:284) as well as (35:38).

Allah also knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth:

"Verily Allah knows the secrets of the heavens and the **earth**: and Allah sees well all that ye do." (49:18)

Only Allah has knowledge of things no one can claim to know:

Verily the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah (alone). It is He Who sends down rain, and He Who knows what is in the wombs. Nor does any one know what it is that he will earn on the morrow: Nor does any one know in what **land** he is to die. Verily with Allah is full knowledge and He is acquainted (with all things). (31:34)³

The occurrence of "أَرْضٌ", translated as "land", in the verse above is significant. Every mortal knows that he has to die. Yet no one knows whether he has only a few moments left or decades. Neither does one know where nor how would death overtake one. Such knowledge rests with Allah alone. In the end everything returns to Him:

And Allah's is the Invisible of the heavens and the **earth**, and unto Him the whole matter will be returned. So worship Him and put thy trust in Him. Lo! thy Lord is not unaware of what ye (mortals) do. (11:123)

Man, in his ignorance, seeks help from others besides Allah. Such people are told:

They serve, besides Allah, things that hurt them not nor profit them, and they say: "These are our intercessors with Allah." Say: "Do ye indeed inform Allah of something He knows not, in the heavens or on **earth**? - Glory to Him! and far is He above the partners they ascribe (to Him)!" (10:18)

The earth has been called "كَفَّاءٌ" (77:25) in the Quran as it draws everything to itself⁴. Man's life, death and resurrection all rest on it. Allah's knowledge is such that:

He knows all that goes into the **earth**, and all that comes out thereof: all that comes down from the sky and all that ascends thereto and He is the Most Merciful, the Oft-Forgiving. (34:2)

The Prophet (pbuh) is directed to say:

Say: "The (Qur'an) was sent down by Him Who knows the mystery (that is) in the heavens and the **earth**: verily He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (25:6)

Say: "Enough is Allah for a witness between me and you: He knows what is in the heavens and on **earth**. And it is those who believe in vanities and reject Allah, that will perish (in the end). (29:52)

Say: "What! Will ye instruct Allah about your religion? But Allah knows all that is in the heavens and on **earth**: He has full knowledge of all things. (49:16)

All the prophets of Allah said the same thing. Abraham said:

"O our Lord! truly Thou dost know what we conceal and what we reveal: for nothing whatever is hidden from Allah, whether on **earth** or in heaven." (14:38)

There is a message for man in the words of Hoopoe to Solomon about the Queen of Saba and her people. He says:

"I found her and her people worshipping the sun besides Allah: Satan has made their deeds seem pleasing to their eyes, and has kept them away from the Path - so they receive no guidance - (Kept them away from the Path), that they should not worship Allah, Who brings to light what is hidden in the heavens and the **earth**, and knows what ye hide and what ye reveal. (27:24-25)

Man is reminded:

Seest thou not that Allah doth know (all) that is in the heavens and on **earth**? There is not a secret consultation between three, but He makes the fourth among them - Nor between five but He makes the sixth - nor between fewer nor more, but He is with them, wheresoever they be: In the end will He tell them the truth of their conduct, on the Day of Judgment. For Allah has full knowledge of all things. (58:7)

11.11. HE WHO UNDERSTANDS THE FINEST MYSTERIES, AND IS WELL-ACQUAINTED WITH THEM (لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ)

Seest thou not that Allah sends down rain from the sky, and forthwith the earth becomes clothed with green? for Allah is He Who understands the finest mysteries, and is well-acquainted (with them). (22:63)

Discussing the Divine name "لَطِيفٌ", Ali says:

Latif, as a name of Allah, is as difficult to define in words as the idea it seeks to represent is difficult to grasp in our minds. It implies: (1) fine, subtle (the basic meaning); (2) so fine and subtle as to be imperceptible to human sight; (3) so pure as to be incomprehensible; (4) with sight so perfect as to see and understand the finest subtleties and mysteries; (5) so

kind and gracious as to bestow gifts of the most refined kind; extraordinarily gracious and understanding. No. 4 is the predominant meaning here [. . .] but every shade of meaning must be borne in mind in each case, as a subsidiary factor in the spiritual melody. (838)

Asad says:

The term *latif* denotes something that is extremely subtle in quality, and therefore intangible and unfathomable. Whenever this term occurs in the Quran with reference to God in conjunction with the adjective *kfāfir* ("all-aware"), it is invariably used to express the idea of His inaccessibility to human perception, imagination or comprehension, as contrasted with His Own all-awareness. (188)

Luqman told his son:

"O my son!" (said Luqman), "If there be (but) the weight of a mustard-seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or (anywhere) in the heavens or on earth, Allah will bring it forth: for Allah understands the finest mysteries, (and) is well-acquainted (with them). (31:16)

11.12. HIS ALL-ENCOMPASSING MERCY

The following verse regarding Allah's Mercy is a source of hope to man:

Say: "To whom belongeth all that is in the heavens and on **earth**?" Say: "To Allah. He hath inscribed for Himself (the rule of) Mercy. That He will gather you together for the Day of Judgment, there is no doubt whatever. It is they who have lost their own souls, that will not believe. (6:12)

Asad translates the expression "كَتَبَ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ" as "[God] who has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy". He comments:

The expression "God has willed upon Himself as a law (*ḥataba ala nafsili*) occurs in the Quran only twice – here and in verse 54 of this surah - and in both instances with reference to His grace and mercy (*rahimati*); none of the other divine attributes has been similarly described. This exceptional quality of God's grace and mercy is further stressed in 7:156 – "My grace overspreads everything" – and finds an echo in the authentic Tradition in which, according to the Prophet, God says of Himself, "Verily, My grace and mercy outstrips my wrath" (Bukhari and Muslim). (173)

Allah, the Creator and Owner of all in the heavens and on earth can forgive or punish whom He pleases but He is "الرَّحْمَنُ", the most Gracious and Merciful:

To Allah belongeth all that is in the heavens and on **earth**. He forgiveth whom He pleaseth and punisheth whom He pleaseth; but Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (3:129)

11.13. MOST FORBEARING , OFT-FORGIVING (حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا)

Another attribute of Allah that occurs with reference to the earth is that He is most Forbearing, oft-Forgiving (حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا). As mentioned earlier, there are fine differences in meaning in Allah's attributes. A number of Divine attributes contain the idea of forgiveness and mercy. An image of Allah's forgiveness and mercy is contained in the following verse:

It is Allah Who sustains the heavens and the **earth**, lest they cease (to function); and if they should fail, there is none - not one - can sustain them thereafter: Verily He is Most Forbearing, Oft-Forgiving. (35:41)

Ali says about this verse:

Allah's world goes on according to the laws and decrees established by Him. There are occasional lapses and deviations on the part of His creatures. But He does not punish every petty fault. One of His merciful qualities is that of repeated forbearance and forgiveness. (1114)

11.14. EXALTED IN MIGHT, ABLE TO ENFORCE HIS WILL, FORGIVING AGAIN AND AGAIN (الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفَّارُ)

Allah's attributes appear in different combinations. One of these great combinations is "الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفَّارُ". Thus while He has absolute might, He is also the most Forgiving. In fact, He forgives again and again. According to Ali, "الْعَزِيزُ" means "Exalted in power, rank, dignity; Incomparable; Full of might and majesty; Able to enforce His will" (833).

The inadequacy of translation is at its most apparent in the case of the translation of Allah's attributes as no single word or phrase can encompass the whole width and depth of meaning inherent in them:

"The Lord of the heavens and the **earth**, and all between - Exalted in Might, able to enforce His Will, forgiving again and again." (38:66)

11.15. TO ALLAH BELONG THE FORCES OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH (عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا)

Another great combination of the Divine attribute "عَزِيزٌ" is with "حَكِيمٌ" which means "Full of Wisdom". Thus with absolute power, Allah also enjoys absolute Knowledge and Wisdom:

For to Allah belong the Forces of the heavens and the **earth**; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Full of Wisdom. (48:7)

Daryabadi translates this verse as :

And Allah's are the legions of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is ever Mighty, Wise.

He elaborates “عَزِيزًا” as “able to inflict destruction on them without human intervention” and “حَكِيمًا” as “using human agency in His wisdom” (215).

11.16. HE IS FREE FROM WANT (الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ)

Only Allah is free of all wants:

To Allah belong all things in heaven and **earth**: verily Allah is He (that is) free of all wants, worthy of all praise. (31:26)

To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on **earth**: for verily Allah - He is free of all wants, Worthy of all Praise. (22:64)

Asad translates “الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ” as “self-sufficient, the One to whom all praise is due”. Ali comments:

Allah's loving kindness and mercies are not like those of human creatures who all depend upon one another, and often expect some kindness or recognition in return. Allah is above all wants and depends in no way whatever on His creatures. His mercies have therefore a special quality, which we cannot describe except by gratefully singing the praises of Allah. (839)

Allah's attribute of “الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ” is highlighted by the use of the earth image in these words of Moses:

And Moses said: "If ye show ingratitude, ye and all on **earth** together - yet is Allah free of all wants, worthy of all praise." (14:8)

11.17. HIS WRATH

Just as Allah's mercy encompasses everything so is His wrath a thing to be feared. When man's transgression reaches its height, spreading injustice and evil over the land, Allah's wrath is invoked. Many nations, given power on earth and sundry blessings, were destroyed because of their willful disobedience to Allah:

See they not how many of those before them We did destroy? - generations We had established on the **earth**, in strength such as We have not given to you - for whom We poured out rain from the skies in abundance, and gave (fertile) streams flowing beneath their (feet): yet for their sins We destroyed them, and raised in their wake fresh generations (to succeed them). (6:6)

The one thing that invokes the wrath of Allah is blasphemy. In Sura al-Maidah, it is said:

In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ, the son of Mary. Say: "Who then hath the least power against Allah, if His will were to destroy Christ, the son of Mary, his mother, and all - everyone that is on the **earth**? For to Allah belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the **earth**, and all that is between. He createth what He pleaseth. For Allah hath power over all things. (5:17)

This verse embodies Allah's extreme wrath over "shirk" i.e. polytheism. From elsewhere in the Quran, it is known that Allah will never forgive polytheism, though He may forgive all other sins. Here, earth is referred to twice. Firstly, to remind men that Allah has power to destroy each and everyone on earth. Secondly, that His is the dominion of the heavens and the earth. This repetition reinforces the central idea of Allah's Sole and Supreme Sovereignty over everyone and everything.

How enormous a sin attributing progeny to Allah is can be realized from this verse:

At it the skies are ready to burst, the **earth** to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, that they should invoke a son for (Allah) Most Gracious. (19: 90-91)

A very powerful expression is used here with reference to the earth i.e. "تَشَقُّقُ الْأَرْضِ". Asad translates it as "the earth be split asunder", Pickthall and Al-Hilali as "the earth is split asunder". The hard and harsh sounds in "تَشَقُّقُ الْأَرْضِ", aided by the repetition of "ق", are responsible for creating the onomatopoeic effect of the splitting asunder of the earth.

11.18. ALLAH IS THE FINAL OWNER (WARIS)

Man tends to think of himself as the owner of the earth. He is always on the lookout to add to his possession of land. Most wars in history have been fought due to man's acquisitive instinct. Ironically, no one can take his possessions to the grave. Everyone has to die. All that is on earth has to perish including the earth itself. Permanence is for Allah alone:

All that is on **earth** will perish: But will abide (forever) the Face of thy Lord - full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour. (55:26-27)

The wealth given to man by Allah is supposed to be used for the good of his fellow human beings. Those who withhold the blessings given to them by Allah are told:

And let not those who covetously withhold of the gifts which Allah Hath given them of His Grace, think that it is good for them: Nay, it will be the worse for them: soon shall the things which they covetously withheld be tied to their necks like a twisted collar, on the Day of Judgement. To Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the **earth**; and Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do. (3:180)

Ali's comments on the expression "وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَاثُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ" in the verse above are:

Another metaphor is now introduced. Material wealth or property is only called ours during our short life here. So all gifts are ours in trust only; they ultimately revert to Allah, to Whom belongs all that is in the heavens or on earth. (485)

Man is reminded:

It is We Who will inherit the **earth**, and all beings thereon: to Us will they all be returned. (19:40)

And verily, it is We Who give life, and Who give death: it is We Who remain inheritors (after all else passes away). (15:23)

In (15:23), the expression used by the Al-mighty is "نَحْنُ الْوَارِثُونَ". According to Asad, it is "an idiomatic metaphor based, according to the consensus of all classical commentators, on the use of the term 'inheritor' or 'heir' in the sense of 'one who remains after his predecessor has passed away' – in this case, after all creation has perished" (385).

The believers are asked:

And what cause have ye why ye should not spend in the cause of Allah? - For to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the **earth** [. . .] (57:10)

11.19. ALL THAT IS IN HEAVENS AND EARTH PRAISES ALLAH

Many of Allah's attributes occur with reference to the fact that all that is in the heavens and on earth praises Allah:

Whatever is in the heavens and on **earth**, doth declare the Praises and Glory of Allah - the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Exalted in Might, the Wise. (62:1)

Whatever is in the heavens and on **earth**, doth declare the Praises and Glory of Allah: to Him belongs dominion, and to Him belongs praise: and He has power over all things. (64:1)

A beautiful image in this context mentions “the birds (of the air) with wings outspread”:

Seest thou not that it is Allah Whose praises all beings in the heavens and on earth do celebrate, and the birds (of the air) with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise. And Allah knows well all that they do. (24:41)

The expression “each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise” is significant as what this mode is might be incomprehensible for man. This is borne out by the following verse:

The seven heavens and the **earth**, and all beings therein, declare His glory: there is not a thing but celebrates His praise; And yet ye understand not how they declare His glory! Verily He is Oft-Forbearing, Most Forgiving! (17:44)

The coming and declining of the day as well as the late afternoon are all times for His praise:

Yea, to Him be praise, in the heavens and on **earth**; and in the late afternoon and when the day begins to decline. (30:18)

At times imperative style is adopted:

Whatever is in the heavens and on **earth** - let it declare the Praises and Glory of Allah: for He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. (57:1)

The same words are repeated in (59:1) and (61:1). Many beautiful attributes of Allah occur in the following verse as all in the heavens and on earth celebrate His praise and glory:

He is Allah, the Creator, the Evolver, the Bestower of Forms (or Colours). To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names: whatever is in the heavens and on **earth**, doth declare His Praises and Glory: and He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. (59:24)

Ali throws light on this verse:

The act or acts of creation have various aspects [. . .] *Kḥalaqa* is the general term for creation, and the Author of all Creation is *Kḥaliq*. *Bara'a* implies a process of evolving from previously created matter or state: the Author of this process is *Bari*, the Evolver. *Sawwara* implies giving definite form or colour, so as to make a thing exactly suited to a given end or object: hence the title *Musawwir*, Bestower of Forms or Colours: for this shows the completion of the visible stage of creation. (1450)

11.20 CONCLUSION

Allah! There is no god but He! To Him belong the most Beautiful Names.
(20:8)

Ninety-nine names of Allah occur in the Qur'an. The above discussion shows how the earth image occurs with reference to many of them. Thus, the earth image appears as a manifestation of different Divine Attributes such as Allah's "tauheed", mercy, knowledge, wisdom, wrath, power, etc.

NOTES

1. Also see 10.4.4. and 10.7.1.
2. See 9.4.3. for the employment of rhetorical questions in this context.
3. 6.16. discusses this verse with reference to organic unity.
4. 8.5. b discusses this metaphor in detail.

CHAPTER 12

DOOMSDAY, RESURRECTION, LIFE AFTER DEATH

12.1. INTRODUCTION

As discussed earlier, the earth image is employed in the Qur'an to reinforce its major themes. Foremost amongst the themes reinforced by the earth image are those of doomsday and resurrection. The Qur'an is very emphatic in its message that this earthly life is but a test. Man will be raised up after death. The record of deeds shall be opened and man rewarded or punished accordingly.

12.2. DOOMSDAY AND RESURRECTION

The Holy Quran says:

To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the **earth**, and the Day that the Hour of Judgment is established - that Day will the dealers in Falsehood perish! (45:27)

Doomsday, Resurrection, Judgement and Life after Death are an essential part of Muslim faith. The faith in after life is of paramount importance as it determines one's attitude and philosophy in life. The last paras of the Qur'an, containing mostly Mekkan suras, abound in images of Doomsday. The earth is the central image in such scenes. Even where not explicitly mentioned, it is there as the backdrop. Man is reminded:

And He has multiplied you through the **earth**, and to Him shall ye be gathered back. (23:79)

From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again. (20:55)

Life is a test. Everything will perish except the One Who has created:

That which is on **earth** we have made but as a glittering show for the **earth**, in order that We may **test** them - as to which of them are best in conduct. Verily what is on **earth** we shall make but as dust and dry soil (without growth or herbage). (18:7-8)

The earth, man's abode and the symbol of stability, will be rent asunder:

The Day when the **Earth** will be rent asunder, from (men) hurrying out: that will be a gathering together - quite easy for Us. (50:44)

One Day the **earth** and the mountains will be in violent commotion. And the mountains will be as a heap of sand poured out and flowing down. (73:14)

Then, when one blast is sounded on the Trumpet, and the **earth** is moved, and its mountains, and they are crushed to powder at one stroke. (69:13-14)

The image of the earth being crushed to powder is repeated in the following verse:

Nay! When the **earth** is pounded to powder, and thy Lord cometh, and His angels, rank upon rank, and Hell, that Day, is brought (face to face) - on that Day will man remember, but how will that remembrance profit him? (89:21)

Qutb says about these verses:

These verses, with their captivating rhythm and sharp notes, portray nevertheless a scene which strikes fear into the hearts, and makes it apparent in the eyes. The earth is being systematically leveled down, Allah the Almighty sits to judge everyone: the angels stand there rank on rank and *Gehanna* is brought near and set in readiness. At that moment "man will remember". (*Fi-Zilal* 168)

The same imagery of violent commotion of the earth and the crumbling of mountains occurs in Sura al-Waqia:

When the Event inevitable cometh to pass,
Then will no (soul) entertain falsehood concerning its coming.
(Many) will it bring low; (many) will it exalt;
When the **earth** shall be shaken to its depths,
And the mountains shall be crumbled to atoms,
Becoming dust scattered abroad,
And ye shall be sorted out into three classes. (56:1-7)

Though no translation can capture the force and dynamism of the original, yet the above translation gives some indication of the powerful imagery used to portray the horrors of Doomsday.

Man is a creature of habit. Familiarity, for him, means security. On the Day of Judgement, the familiar earth would be no more:

One day the **Earth** will be changed to a different **Earth**, and so will be the heavens, and (men) will be marshalled forth, before Allah, the One, the Irresistible (14:48)

Ali says that “‘A new earth and a new heaven’ refers to the entirely changed conditions at the end of things as we know them” (616). Asad is of the view that “in the eschatology of the Qur’an, the ‘end of the world’ does not signify an annihilation – i.e., reduction to nothingness – of the physical universe but, rather, its fundamental, cataclysmic transformation into something that men cannot now visualize” (482).

On that day, men will be roused from their graves:

And the Day that the Trumpet will be sounded - then will be smitten with terror those who are in the heavens, and those who are on **earth**, except such as Allah will please (to exempt): and all shall come to His (Presence) as beings conscious of their lowliness. (27:87)

In the following verse, the theme of resurrection is reinforced by referring twice to the earth:

And among His Signs is this, that heaven and **earth** stand by His Command: then when He calls you, by a single call, from the **earth**, behold, ye (straightway) come forth. (30:25)

The earth image occurs thrice in a most awe-inspiring manner in the following verses:

No just estimate have they made of Allah, such as is due to Him: On the Day of Judgment the whole of the **earth** will be but His handful, and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand: Glory to Him! High is He above the Partners they attribute to Him! The Trumpet will (just) be sounded, when all that are in the heavens and on **earth** will swoon, except such as it will please Allah (to exempt). Then will a second one be sounded, when, behold, they will be standing and looking on! And the **Earth** will shine with the Glory of its Lord: the Record (of Deeds) will be placed (open); the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forward and a just decision pronounced between them; and they will not be wronged (in the least). (39:67-69)

Here the earth and the heavens appear rolled up in Allah’s right hand. Ali says that “the whole earth will be no more to Allah than a thing that a man might enclose in the

hollow of his hand, nor will the heavens with their vast expanse be more than a scroll, which a man might roll up with his right hand, the hand of power and action” (1199).

The trumpet sounded and all in the heavens and the earth swooned. They were raised when the trumpet sounded again. The earth shone with the glory of Allah’s Light. The narrative, made in the past tense, is such that the reader/listener feels that he has witnessed the whole.

12.3. THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST RESURRECTION AND THEIR REFUTATION IN THE QUR’AN

According to Moududi, the earliest message of the Prophet comprised three elements: belief in one Allah, prophethood of Mohammad (pbuh), and resurrection i.e. men will be raised up after death in bodily form and rewarded and punished in accordance with the deeds done by them in their earthly life. Though the Mekkans also objected to the first two parts of the Prophet’s message, it was the concept of resurrection that was totally unacceptable to them. They ridiculed it. The disbelievers could not credit the idea that they would be raised again. Consequently, the theme of Resurrection recurs in Mekkan suras quite frequently. As Moududi says:

But in order to bring them to the way of Islam it was absolutely essential that the doctrine of the Hereafter should be instilled into their minds, for without belief in this doctrine, it was not at all possible that they could adopt a serious attitude with regard to the truth and falsehood, could change their standard of values in respect of good and evil, and giving up worship of the world, could be inclined to follow the way that Islam urged them to follow.

Al-Quran documents the doubts and objections of the disbelievers as well as answers them:

The Unbelievers say, "Never to us will come the Hour": Say, "Nay! but most surely, by my Lord, it will come upon you - by Him Who knows the unseen - from Whom is not hidden the least little atom in the Heavens or on **earth**: Nor is there anything less than that, or greater, but is in the Record Perspicuous (34:3)

And they say: "What! When we lie, hidden and lost, in the **earth**, shall we indeed be in a Creation renewed? Nay, they deny the Meeting with their Lord. (32:10)

The mankind is reminded in this verse:

O mankind! if ye have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (Our Power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then (foster you) that ye may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (much). And (further), thou seest the **earth** barren and lifeless, but when We pour down rain on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs). This is so, because Allah is the Reality: it is He Who gives life to the dead, and it is He Who has power over all things. (22:5-6)

The case for resurrection is made here by reminding man of his origin. A micro-approach is taken in this context giving detailed description of the development of the foetus¹. Reference is made to the revival of the dead earth after rain which produces and sustains life. The argument is clinched by saying that it is Allah who gives life to the dead. He has power over all things.

Say: "Travel through the **earth** and see how Allah did originate creation; so will Allah produce a later creation: for Allah has power over all things. He punishes whom He pleases, and He grants Mercy to whom He pleases, and towards Him are ye turned. "Not on **earth** nor in heaven will ye be able (fleeing) to frustrate (His Plan), nor have ye, besides Allah, any protector or helper." (29:20-22)

The revival of the dead earth when rain falls on it is taken as proof of Resurrection²:

It is Allah Who sends forth the Winds, so that they raise up the Clouds, and We drive them to a land that is dead, and revive the **earth** therewith after its death: even so (will be) the Resurrection! (35:9)

All around him, man sees plants and vegetation growing, decaying and then again reappearing. He does not find anything to marvel over in it. Allah employs the same metaphor for man in the Qur'an, reminding him that for Him raising the dead is as simple as the cyclic growth of plants:

And Allah has produced you from the **earth** growing (gradually), and in the End He will return you into the (earth), and raise you forth (again at the Resurrection)? (71:17-18)

The above metaphor has been discussed in 8.5.

In the following verse, the argument of the disbelievers is presented in their own words:

"What! When we die and become dust, (shall we live again?) That is a (sort of) return far (from our understanding)." (50:3)

The next verse provides the answer of the Almighty. The earth image occurs in an awe-inspiring manner here:

We already know how much of them the **earth** takes away: With Us is a Record guarding (the full account). (50:4)

Mahmud says:

Witnessing of our own body parts against us is no more an incomprehensive thing in these days. Importance of finger prints in Criminology is an old art and well known. But the recent developments in the study of the human bones, hair, blood, tissues, secretions, etc. are highly startling. A wealth of information can be obtained about an individual from the study of very small samples of these things taken even from his dead body. For example, human hair is already being used as a tell-tale even thousands of years after death. (176)

12.4. HEAVEN AND HELL

According to the verses of the Holy Quran as well as hadith no one knows the blessings of paradise in store for the righteous. They are such that no eye has seen or ears heard or lips tasted.

Now no person knows what delights of the eye are kept hidden (in reserve) for them - as a reward for their (good) deeds. (32:17)

"Jannat" i.e. the "garden" is the ultimate in bliss. The believers are urged to strive for it:

Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a Garden whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the **earth**, prepared for the righteous (3:133)

Similarly, the torments of hell are such that whoever has been saved from it, is successful. The Qur'an says:

Every soul shall have a taste of death: And only on the Day of Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the

Fire and admitted to the Garden will have attained the object (of Life): For the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception. (3:185)

According to Frithjof Schuon:

The Images of Paradise or Hell are always symbolical of realities which are indescribable in sensory terms, whence their excessiveness; it would thus be idle to complain of the fact that images of Paradise, for example contain what is humanly unimaginable, unintelligible, or even absurd. (20)

In 5.5. the views of Qutb and Asad have been given. According to Qutb, the Qur'an adopts an imagistic style even to propound metaphysical concepts so that they can penetrate the depths of human psyche. Asad, likewise, is of the view that to give man an idea of the immeasurable and the infinite (be it bliss or punishment), to make the inconceivable conceivable, Qur'an uses symbolism and allegory. Thus, the joys of paradise and the torments of hell have been described in terms of earthly imagery. Haleem says that "The Qur'an clearly states that the descriptions that are given of *janna* are given as *mathal* (13:35;47:15) which the translators have rendered as 'parable', 'similitude', or 'likeness' – in other words, specific representations of things that belong to this world but are used to refer to the next" (106).

All blessings of paradise have been described in terms of the most beautiful and pleasurable of the earthly images. There are frequent references to "jannat" or "janna" underneath which rivers flow. To enable believers to visualize that which cannot be visualized, the dimensions of paradise have been given in terms of the heavens and the earth in (3:133) i.e. "[...] a Garden whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the **earth**, prepared for the righteous". The following verse repeats the same idea about the dimensions of this garden which is described in terms of this earth and the heavens:

Be ye foremost (in seeking) Forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden (of Bliss), the width whereof is as the width of heaven and **earth**, prepared for those who believe in Allah and His apostles: that is the Grace of Allah, which He bestows on whom he pleases: and Allah is the Lord of Grace abounding. (57:21)

About heavenly food, it is said:

But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with

before," for they are given things in similitude; and they have therein companions pure (and holy); and they abide therein (for ever). (2:25)

Regarding expression "for they are given things in similitude" in the verse above, Moududi comments that "the fruits of Paradise will not be so exotic in appearance as to be unfamiliar to people. They will resemble the fruits to which human beings are accustomed in this world, though infinitely excelling them in delicacy of taste" (Tafheem 55).

How far earthly images have been used for the description of the Hereafter can be realized from the fact that the very word "النَّارُضُ" has been used for heaven by its inhabitants in the following verses:

And those who feared their Lord will be led to the Garden in crowds: until behold, they arrive there; its gates will be opened; and its keepers will say: "Peace be upon you! well have ye done! enter ye here, to dwell therein." They will say: "Praise be to Allah, Who has truly fulfilled His Promise to us, and has given us (this) **land** in heritage: We can dwell in the Garden as we will: how excellent a reward for those who work (righteousness)!" (73-74)

In contrast, the worst nightmare of man seems to be embodied in images of torments in hell:

(They will be) in the midst of a Fierce Blast of Fire and in Boiling Water, And in the shades of Black Smoke, Nothing (will there be) to refresh, nor to please. (56:42-44).

Pride is the original sin. It is pride that made Satan disobey Allah. Hell would be the abode of the arrogant. The dwellers of hell would be told:

"That was because ye were wont to rejoice on the **earth** in things other than the Truth, and that ye were wont to be insolent. "Enter ye the gates of Hell, to dwell therein: and evil is (this) abode of the arrogant!" (40:75-76)

The following is the only verse of its kind in the Holy Qur'an that seems to indicate that the hell, heavens and the earth might not be permanent:

Those who are wretched shall be in the Fire: There will be for them therein (nothing but) the heaving of sighs and sobs: They will dwell therein for all the time that the heavens and the **earth** endure, except as thy Lord willeth: for thy Lord is the (sure) accomplisher of what He

planneth. And those who are blessed shall be in the Garden: They will dwell therein for all the time that the heavens and the **earth** endure, except as thy Lord willeth: a gift without break. (11:106-108)

Pickthal translates “مَا دَامَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ” in the verse above as “so long as the heavens and the earth endure”. Daryabadi translates it as “so long as the heavens and the earth remain”. In his opinion, “the phrase signifies ‘for ever’” (350).

Ali comments:

Some Muslim theologians deduce from this the conclusion that the penalties referred to are not eternal, because the heavens and the earth as we see them are not eternal, and the punishments for the deeds of a life that will end should not be such as will never end. The majority of Muslim theologians reject this view. [. . .] (539)

Asad resolves this controversy by giving the viewpoint of Tabari “that in ancient Arabic usage the expressions ‘as long as the heavens and the earth endure’, or ‘as long as night and day alternate’, etc., were used metonymically in the sense of ‘time beyond count’ (*abad*)” (332).

12.5. CONCLUSION

The above analysis aims at an overview of the earth image in the Qur’an with reference to Doomsday, Resurrection and Life after death. It is seen that the earth image is used to reinforce these themes. Whether explicitly or implicitly, the earth image also occurs with reference to heaven and hell. The imagery of bliss and punishment is presented concretely in terms of earthly images making an appeal to man’s reason as well as emotion.

NOTES

1. See 6.15. for a discussion of this aspect.
2. This aspect has been discussed in detail in 6.20.1., 8.3.1. and 9.3.

CHAPTER 13

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

13.1. INTRODUCTION

“The biggest obstacle in understanding the Qur’an is lack of knowledge”, so expounds Ahmed Rafiq Akhtar. With the increase in man’s knowledge, the hidden import of the verses of Qur’an becomes manifest. In the scientific age of today, many Qur’anic verses not understood before are becoming clear. Man is issued a challenge in the Qur’an:

“O ye assembly of Jinns and men! If it be ye can pass beyond the zones of the heavens and the **earth**, pass ye! not without authority shall ye be able to pass!” (55:33)

Twenty-five years back, Carl Sagan wrote:

The dimensions of the cosmos are so large that using familiar units of distance, such as meters or miles, chosen for their utility on earth would make little sense. Instead, we measure distance with the speed of light. [. . .] There are some hundred billion galaxies, each with, on the average, a hundred billion stars. In all the galaxies, there are perhaps as many planets as stars, [. . .], ten billion trillion. (2-3)

The significance of the challenge made in (55:33) becomes manifest only after an inkling about the dimensions of the universe brought to light by the scientific advancement of today.

The Qur’an, as discussed in chapter 1, fosters in its followers a spirit of enquiry. Iqbal, after quoting Qur’anic verses that refer to different phenomena in the heavens and the earth, says:

No doubt, the immediate purpose of the Qur’an in this reflective observation of Nature is to awaken in man the consciousness of that of which nature is regarded a symbol. But the point to note is the general empirical attitude of the Qur’an which engendered in its followers a feeling of reverence for the actual and ultimately made them the founders of modern science. (11)

13.2. THE PRESENT RESEARCH

It was under a similar spirit of enquiry, in accordance with the Qur'anic injunction to ponder and think, that the researcher undertook a study of nature imagery in al-Qur'an. The abundance and wealth of nature imagery made delimitation a necessity. As most nature imagery occurs with reference to the earth, the topic was delimited to "Nature imagery in the Qur'an with reference to the earth".

It was found that the earth image occurs in most suras of the Quran (80 out of 114) to reinforce its major themes. Foremost of these themes is *Tauheed* i.e. the Sole Sovereignty of Allah. Besides *Tauheed*, many other attributes of Allah occur with reference to the earth image. These have been discussed in chapter 11.

The concept of "الآخرة" i.e. life after death is the corner stone of Muslim faith. The earth image, as discussed in chapters 8, 9 and 12, is frequently employed to present the concept of afterlife convincingly in the Qur'an. Reference is made in this regard to the dead earth being brought to life after rain. Such would be the resurrection.

"What is the character and general structure of the universe in which we live? Is there a permanent element in the constitution of this universe? How are we related? What place do we occupy in it, and what is the kind of conduct that befits the place we occupy?" (1). These questions posed by Iqbal have been asked by man in all ages. Chapter 10 "Man and Earth" addresses some of these questions through Qur'anic verses that allude to the earth.

The earth image occurs with reference to man and God, life and death, growth and decay, reward and punishment. It assumes different forms and fulfils diverse functions in the Qur'an (chapters 7 & 9). Along with the literal use of the word, there is its extensive figurative use as the earth is generally personified in the Qur'an besides being an "آية" i.e. a symbol of Allah. It occurs in similes and metaphors as well as in different kinds of images (chapter 8). Chapter 6 of the thesis discussed some general characteristics of nature imagery in the Qur'an which also apply to earth imagery.

The premise of the present research has been that an overview of earth imagery in the Quran would bring forth a deeper insight into the Book of Allah besides showing the earth inhabited by man from a multi-dimensional perspective.

13.3. SUGGESTIONS

13.3.1. Elements of Nature

As stated earlier, nature imagery in al-Qur'an is a very vast topic. "الأرض" i.e. the earth is just one facet in a whole kaleidoscope of nature images. There are references to the heavens, sun, moon and stars, clouds, winds and rain, flowers and fruits, vegetables and grains, animals and insects, rocks and minerals, fire and water, etc. Each one of these elements of nature can be investigated further.

13.3.2. Images of Different Types

Nature imagery in al-Qur'an furnishes images of various kinds. As discussed in chapters 2 and 8, these include visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, thermal, kinaesthetic, etc. Research can be carried out on each of these different kinds of images in the Qur'an.

13.3.3. Individual Suras

In many suras, the earth image occurs within a specific framework. Research can be carried out on the imagery of any individual sura and how it reinforces its main themes.

13.3.4. Continuation of Present Research

a. Diverse Themes

The present research has unearthed various themes that are reinforced by allusion to the earth e.g. the earth is Allah's, migration, jihad, how to live on earth, etc. Each of these can be studied further.

b. Earth in Narratives

As discussed in 9.4.1., the earth image occurs in many Qur'anic narratives e.g. in Sura Al-Baqara, Al-Isra, Ash-shuara An-Naml, Al-Ankaboot, Saba, As-Saaffat, Al-Ghafir. It is used extensively in Sura Al-A'raaf, Yusuf and Al-Qasas. It also occurs in Sura al-An'aam and Hud. What bearing the earth image has on various Qur'anic narratives can be researched further. For example, in Sura al-ara'f, the earth image occurs at significant points of the narrative to reinforce the main theme of the sura.

c. General Attributes of Nature Imagery

Chapter 6 discusses some general characteristics of nature imagery in the Qur'an. This area can be researched further.

d. Functions Fulfilled by Nature Imagery

Chapter 7 discusses various functions fulfilled by nature imagery. These can be studied further.

e. The Earth Image and Scientific Discoveries

One aspect of earth imagery has barely been touched upon in this research. This is with regard to the Qur'anic verses containing the earth image and scientific discoveries. To its contemporary audience, the nature and earth imagery in al-Quran would have had poetic and aesthetic appeal. To today's reader, it is also a testimony of scientific truths.

Reference is made to mountains as pegs to balance the earth in numerous Qur'anic verses such as (16:15), (21:31). In (21:30), reference is made to how the heavens and the earth were joined together but were cloven asunder. This is being borne out by latest research. The earth image as an illustration of scientific truths can constitute an area for further study.

13.4. CONCLUSION

Due to the very large number of earth allusions in the Quran, a compromise had to be made in the present research. It could be either a longitudinal or a vertical study i.e. it could either be broad enough to give an idea of the scope of the earth image in the Quran or deep enough to study just one of these aspects in great detail. The researcher opted for the first course as the diversity of themes and contexts in which the earth image occurs is a fascinating study. It brings to light aspects which are not always focused upon.

At the conclusion of this study, the researcher is conscious of the fact that she has barely touched the surface of her topic. No Ph.D thesis can hope to encompass any aspect of the Glorious Quran. This is testified by the Almighty Himself:

And if all the trees on **earth** were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet would not the words of Allah be exhausted (in the writing); for Allah is Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom. (31:27)

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